

Implications of Escalating Banditry on National Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the implications of increasing banditry on national security in Nigeria. The data for the study were collected using internet material, newspapers, journals, official reports, and books. A content analysis approach was adopted to analyze the study data. Findings revealed that there have been high incidences of banditry attacks on farmers, villages, communities, and highways resulting in kidnapping, killings, cattle rustling, displacement, loss of properties, and other security challenges in Nigeria. All these have further increased the level of poverty, unemployment, hunger, school dropout, food insecurity, and humanitarian crisis in the country. It also revealed the factors necessitating the rise of banditry in recent times which include, unemployment, weak security system, poverty, the porosity of Nigeria's borders, arms proliferation, illegal mining activities, and the presence of large ungoverned spaces which serve as hideouts to the bandits. It further revealed that Nigerian governments had made efforts to curb banditry through military operations, granting amnesty to bandits, setting up vigilante groups, and engaging private negotiators but all failed to curtail banditry, especially in the northern region of Nigeria. Therefore, to address banditry in Nigeria, the study recommends that the causative factors of banditry should be tackled by governments at all levels, starting from the traditional rulers, and local councils, up to the federal government of Nigeria.

Keywords: Banditry, Insecurity, National Security, Nigeria.

Introduction

Insecurity in Nigeria has gone full circle in recent years, due to the countrywide emergence and domination of various non-state armed groups with differing rationales, objectives, and modus operandi (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022). Consequently, Nigeria is currently grappling with a plethora of security challenges which is impacting negatively on Nigeria's national security and development. Some of these security challenges are criminal gangs, separatist groups, Islamic fundamentalists, banditry, Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen-farmers clashes, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery ethnoreligious conflicts, piracy, Biafra secessionist movement, unknown gunmen debacle, militancy amongst others (Okoli, 2019; Mac-Leva, 2021; Ojewale & Balogun, 2022).

Among these security challenges, banditry has escalated in recent times and it continues to constitute a major challenge to the Nigerian state. Armed bandits have been terrorizing rural communities, rustling cattle, raping and abducting women and girls, killing people, razing houses, bombing railway tracks, kidnapping passengers, and committing highway

robbery (Usman & Singh, 2021; Gimba, 2022). The activities of these bandits have created tensions, especially in Northern Nigeria. Since 2015, the northern region of Nigeria has witnessed a steady increase in insecurity and violent attacks. Civilians and government security forces have been the victims. Numerous data tracking sources have shown an escalation of incidents since January 2021. A common atrocity of the bandits is the invasion of communities, destroying houses, property, and crops, and kidnapping the inhabitants. The motive appears to be to displace people and occupy their arable lands (Musa, 2021). The pervasive banditry and its associated security threats, which have enveloped the northern region of Nigeria, particularly, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Niger states, have become a worrisome national security issue of public concern (Mohammed, 2021; Mac-Leva, 2021; Gimba, 2022). There appears to be a difference between perpetrators' actions and the way they are labeled. Government calls them 'bandits' and 'unknown gunmen'. Others have insisted that a more appropriate description would be terrorists (Musa, 2021). Consequently, bandit gangs were declared terrorists by the Federal Government in January 2022. However, at present, Nigeria's most pressing security challenge is described as 'banditry' by state officials – a composite crime including armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, rape, village raid, cattle rustling, and illegal possession of firearms (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022).

Both federal and state governments have made efforts to address the challenges of banditry. Some state governors have offered amnesty to bandits to curb bandit attacks. The Federal Government has also employed numerous strategies to put an end to banditry through its security agencies, by establishing several operations leading to the arrest of many culprits and the seizure of numerous weapons from armed bandits, yet the problem continued to spread like wildfire which poses threat to Nigeria's national security (Usman & Singh, 2021). Thus, no concrete and sustainable solution has been achieved as bandits continue to terrorize and hold sway in rural communities, especially in the northern region of the country. States mostly affected by the current spate of banditry include Sokoto, Kastina, Kaduna, Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Taraba, Niger, Nassarawa, Bauchi, and Kebbi (Mac-Leva, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Gimba, 2022).

Banditry is on the increase in northern Nigeria. This is a region with many security problems, chief among them Boko Haram's insurgency. In the north-central region, herdsmen militancy has become a key security concern. Northwest Nigeria, which used to be the bastion of security and stability, has been hit hard by banditry (Okoli, 2019). Banditry in the northern states especially Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, and Niger State has reached alarming heights in recent years. Bandits terrorize villages with impunity. They have settled in the Zamfara state, setting up fortified enclaves in the hinterland and on the frontiers, from where they plot and carry out their operations in other states (Okoli, 2019; Mohammed, 2021; Gimba, 2022). Consequently, communities, especially those living in Nigeria's Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina states in the Northwest and North-central have been at the receiving end of armed banditry for almost a decade now. These communities have been facing serious insecurity, ranging from armed group violence

to kidnappings and banditry, which has affected most of the people living in those areas (Mac-Leva, 2021; Mohammed, 2021).

Currently, the attacks now affect the entire northern region of Nigeria, especially the border area with Niger. In what has become a reoccurring 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 have been kidnapped for ransom (Wanep.Org, August 19, 2020; Mohammed, 2021). This trend gradually spread to neighboring states, such as Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Kebbi in 2019. As a result, these states established a committee headed by Muhammad Abubakar, a former inspector-general of police (Nationonlineng.net, July 10, 2019). He estimated that between 2011 and 2019, 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children were orphaned, and more than 190,340 people were displaced in Zamfara due to armed banditry. The former Governor of Zamfara state, Abdulaziz Yari, similarly reported that nearly 500 villages and 13,000 hectares of land were destroyed and 2,835 people were killed in his state between 2011 and 2018 (HumAngle.ng, August 2, 2020). The Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma, and Sububu forests in the North West region have since become strategic areas for banditry groups to carry out their attacks (Mohammed, 2021). Banditry has emerged as the new villain of Nigeria's insecurity, joining a long and growing list that includes Boko Haram insurgents, militants, herdsmen, cultists, kidnappers, etc. (Chukwueme, Phinos & Agaba, 2019).

Objectives

1. To examine the factors that necessitated banditry in Nigeria
2. To look at the nature of banditry in Nigeria
3. To identify the consequences of banditry on national security in Nigeria
4. To assess the efforts of Nigerian governments in mitigating banditry in Nigeria.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was adopted that systematically gathers information from government documents and academic papers. Thus, data were generated from official reports, internet materials, newspapers, journals, and books. All the extracted information from the secondary sources was critically reviewed and synthesized using content analysis.

Conceptual Discourse

This section discusses the central concept of the paper such as banditry as well as the theoretical framework of analysis.

Banditry

The conceptualization of banditry as it were can be made clear by understanding who a bandit is. The discernment of a bandit has experienced a few stages. A bandit might be alluded to as an opportunity warrior, within the setting of the 19th century Americas and

Europe, whose obligation was to battle for the liberation of the colonized. Within the 21st-century African setting, a bandit may be seen as one who commits the wrongdoing of equipped theft, slaughtering, and annihilation of properties, especially, of herders, vendors, and commerce proprietors (Olapeju & Peter, 2021).

Thus, banditry is derived from the term bandit while bandits are simply known as heavily armed criminal gangs that have terrorized Nigeria's rural northwest, killing, kidnapping, forcing people from their homes, and taunting the authorities with their brazenness (Hassan, 2021). Banditry means the occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob, rape or kill. Banditry is a crime against persons. It has been a common genre of crime, as well as causing violence in contemporary societies (Nigeria Watch, 2011).

According to Shalangwa (2013), banditry refers to the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offense or defense, especially in semi-organized groups to overpower the victim and obtain loot or achieving some political goals. Such bandits are usually perceived as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a definite residence or destination but roam around the forest and mountains to avoid being identified, detected, and arrested. To Uche & Iwuamadi (2018) banditry is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape, and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims, a development that has been brought to the front burner of national security (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). In the same vein Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), define the term banditry as criminal acts associated with armed robbery and violent crime. Banditry involves the use of threats or force to intimidate targets, with the intent to kill or rob the victims. In his perception, Okoli (2019) averred that banditry includes cattle rustling, armed robbery, village raids, and kidnapping for ransom among others. To him, banditry refers to armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation. The victims are individuals and communities with material valuables (Okoli, 2019).

Bandits' activities in Nigeria are widespread and can be targeted at individuals or groups and the prime targets are mostly ordinary citizens of the country rich or poor (Usman & Singh, 2021). Thus, the vicious attacks on local communities and kidnappings by criminal groups in the northern region are being described by state officials as 'banditry' (Ojewale, 2021). The resurgence of banditry in recent times started with a lone criminal gang in 2011 and grew from a single cell, mainly operating in Zamfara, to over 120 gangs across six states in 2021. There has been a progressive transformation from its rudimentary and isolated roots to a complicated transnational and rapidly spreading security threat (Ojewale, 2021). However, the recent spate of banditry-related violence began in 2014 with cattle rustling activity, but the matter became worse in early 2016 when the bandits started killing local miners in Zamfara communities (Mohammed, 2021).

National Security

It is germane to know what security is all about before delving into national security. According to Adebakin (2012:8), "security is the activities that ensure the protection of a country, person, properties of the community against future threats, danger, mishaps and all other forms of perils. Otto & Ukpere (2012: 67) and Adebakin (2012:9) assert that "security means protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life in homes, offices or communities. Also, Nwagboso (2012) viewed security as the act of being safe from harm or danger, the defence, protection, and preservation of values, and the absence of threats to acquired values. In the same vein, King (2016) cited in Gubak & Bulus (2018) described security as stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of daily life, protection from crime, and freedom from psychological harm. Security is related to the presence of peace, safety, happiness, and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis, and threats to human injury among others.

The above definitions of security by different scholars are a constituent element of the concept of human security or internal security, with a fundamental difference from what is often termed as national security, where the focus is on the survival of the state against military threats posted by other states (Buzan, 2003, Stephen, 2006). The United Nations Development Programme (1994: 229) posits that human security (an aspect of national security) refers to "freedom from fear and freedom from want" and "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or communities"(UNDP, 2006:229). Thus, national security has been intrinsically linked to human security. However, human security is at the epicenter of national security. Human security prioritizes the security of the individual over that of the state since there can be no state without its citizens (Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake, 2019:11).

On the other hand national literally connotes the security of a nation (Mofolorunsho, Idah & Abu-Saeed, 2019). National security differs from country to country based on the prevailing situation and circumstance but generally, national security is concerned with anything that endangers the well-being of people living in a sovereign geographical area. It also includes their safety, security, and freedoms and it is the primary responsibility of a nation to protect its citizens from any form of threat (Usman & Singh, 2021). In this regard, Paleri (2008), stated:

National security is the measurable state capability of a nation to overcome the multi-dimensional threats to the apparent well-being of its people and its survival as a nation-state at any given time, by balancing all instruments of the state policy through governance, that can be indexed by computation, empirically or otherwise and is extendable to global security variables external to it (Paleri, 2008:13).

Babangida (2011) defines national security "as the physical protection and defence of our citizens and our territorial integrity and also the promotion of the economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nigerians in a safe and secure environment that promotes the attainment of our national interests and those of our foreign partners.

Before now the concept of national security was originally perceived solely as the defence against military attack. However, national security is now widely understood to include also non-military dimensions, including security from terrorism, minimization of crime, economic security, energy security, environmental security, food security, cyber security, etc (Usman & Singh, 2021). Thus, national security is no longer conceived from the narrow, restrictive, militaristic, and strategic perspective that focuses on the absence of threats to governmental authority and the presence of domestic capacity to contain activities from centrifugal forces whether in terms of internal subversive activities or as external attempts to sabotage and attack the state (Nwozor, 2018; Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake, 2019).

Nevertheless, Mbachu (2012), contends that national security has to do with the security of the entire citizenry in all ramifications of life that covers health, economy, education, good government, food technology, environment, politics, etc. in the same vein, Nwozor (2013) has pointed out that national security now transcends the traditional frontiers of state centrism and incorporates man and the environment within the milieu of sustainability. Thus, within the precinct of this conceptualization, national security may be viewed as "a multidimensional phenomenon whose leitmotif centers on safeguarding national values, which in turn encompasses all the actions taken by the state in furtherance of its diverse policies concerning its overall security whether symbolic, physical or psychological" (Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake, 2019:11). According to UNDP (1994:229) national security can summarily be described as "protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards". Similarly, Mofolorunsho, Idah & Abu-Saeed (2019:179) conceptualize national security as:

"The ability of the government to curtail any form of internal or external threat capable of undermining her primary responsibilities of protecting her citizenry and property. It includes all attempts to safeguard the unity, values, and all legitimate and culturally prescribed norms of citizens to perform their societal obligation as well as meet basic survival needs"(Mofolorunsho, Idah & Abu-Saeed, 2019:179).

According to Mofolorunsho, Idah & Abu-Saeed (2019), national security is critical for national development and intra-societal co-existence. It entails the protection of a nation and its people from internal and external aggression and other matters of geographical, social, and economic interest. Orji, (2012:199) posits that "pivotal to the survival of any society is its law and order which are predicated on national security. National security must be broadened to accommodate economic, environmental, and demographic issues as they are important in understanding the new causes of intra-state conflicts".

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the objective of national security is to achieve complete security for both the state and its citizens by engendering an environment of peace. It is a peaceful environment that catalyzes the realization of people's well-being. A peaceful environment must reassure the citizens of their safety from every form of symbolic, physical, and psychological threats (Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake, 2019). Therefore, the national security of any nation encompasses other vital areas such as environmental protection, social and food security, and more especially the prevalence of

internal peace. Without adequate security of lives and property, the system will be rife with lawlessness, chaos, and eventual disintegration. It might be military, economic, ideological, or cultural (Nwolise, 2006; Omede, 2011; Gubak & Bulus, 2018).

It should be noted that the government is primarily responsible for national security in Nigeria. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specified in section 14(1) (b) that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. This has to do with the protection of the lives and properties of the citizens as well as the guarantee of citizens' welfare through the provision of the basic needs of lives. In other words, ensuring freedom from fear and freedom from want (Osewa, 2022). Therefore the inability of the government to guarantee the safety of life and property of her citizenry most especially within her territory negates the very existence of the government (Mofolorunsho, Idah & Abu-Saeed, 2019:178). Since almost every state constitutionally pledges to pursue the welfare of its citizens, its national security framework must necessarily incorporate policy thrusts that focus on, and rectify issues that are promotive of human security (Nwozor, Olanrewaju & Ake, 2019).

Different security agencies are in charge of maintaining internal and national security in Nigeria. These are the police, immigration, customs, and civil defence organizations (Osewa, 2022). Notwithstanding, Nigeria as a state is currently bedeviled with internal insecurity challenges such as Boko Haram insurgency, terrorism, militancy, banditry, Fulani herdsmen/Farmers clashes, kidnappings, armed robbery, communal clashes, religious conflicts, etc (Mofolorunsho, Idah & Abu-Saeed, 2019). All these have continued to hinder the development of the country as well as the threatened national security country. Other dangers that serve as a threat to national security include hunger, starvation, poverty, unemployment, youth restiveness, environmental degradation, pollution, natural disasters, diseases, homelessness, underdevelopment, actions by violent non-state actors, narcotic cartels and by multinational corporations, marginalization, and socio-economic injustices (Onigbinde, 2008; Gubak & Bulus, 2018; Gambo & Inuwa, 2020; Usman & Singh, 2021). Security is crucial for national unity, cohesion, peace, nation-building, and sustainable development. Consequently, national security is a desideratum, *sine qua non* for nation-building, economic growth, and development of any country (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Many theories could be used to explain the escalating banditry in Nigeria. Some of the theories are the frustration-aggression theory, relational vengeance theory, situational action theory, relative deprivation theory, strain theory, and queer ladder theory. However, this study is anchored on the frustration-aggression theory.

The frustration-aggression theory was proposed by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer, and Robert Sears in 1939 and further developed by Neal Miller in 1941 and Leonard Berkowitz in 1969 (Miller, Doob, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Miller, 1941; Berkowitz, 1989). The theory assumes that aggression is always a result of frustration and that frustration always leads to some form of aggression (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, &

Sears, 1939; Fererabend & Feirauben, 1972). They defined frustration as interference with an incited target response that occurs at the appropriate time in the behavioral sequence. Thus, frustration is an interruption of the intended response to a behavioural task, which can interfere with the completion of the task (Dollard et al., 1939).

One of the proponents of the frustration-aggression theory generated some modifications to the central hypothesis as a result of the interrogations and criticisms. Hence, Miller (1941) noted that it is not always clear that frustration always leads to aggression or that aggression is always propelled by frustration. His intervention led to the second round of the hypothesis, which reflected a more acceptable reality that frustration can produce instigations to several different kinds of response, one of which is instigation to some form of aggression.

Some years later, Berkowitz (1989) argued that aggression can be driven by inherent personal benefits to the aggressor, rather than by past wrongdoings. People are more akin to attack when they discover that they are willfully sabotaged or denied what it's legitimately theirs, rather than when the interference is an accidental occurrence. He hypothesized that frustrations are aversive events and can generate aggressive inclinations only to the extent that they have a negative effect (Berkowitz, 1989).

According to Fererabend & Feirauben (1972), aggression is caused by frustration, which results from an individual's inability to achieve their goals. Banditry is the result of aggressive behaviour that is caused by other problems, such as poverty and unemployment (Adegoke, 2019). Thus, the increasing number of bandit attacks in Nigeria is largely due to economic difficulties and struggles. The acts of banditry that are common, such as cattle rustling, kidnapping, physical attacks, and encroaching on farms, are caused by frustrations (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). Therefore, the frustration-aggression theory argument is germane to the rising banditry in Nigeria which suggests that banditry in the country is caused by the need of the disgruntled elements of society to get out of poverty and improve their social standing. That is why the phenomenon of ransom is common in bandit operations. However, when the ransom fails to materialize, bandits become more tense and frustrated and resort to killing their victims.

Results and Discussions

The results and discussions of this paper are presented below in line with the objectives of the study.

1. The Factors that Necessitated Banditry in Nigeria

Many reasons have been given as the probable causes of banditry in Nigeria. For example, Inyang (2009) connected the issue of unemployment as one of such reasons banditry in Nigeria is frequently related to youth unemployment. There are uncountable able-bodied men and ladies in Nigeria meandering the boulevards in the look of non-existing work. Out of disappointment in conjunction with mounting obligations to handle numerous sit-still young persons have wandered into criminal exercises of which banditry isn't an exclusion.

To Eyikomisan et al (2021) the lack of rural security and the protection offered by a vast and mineral-rich forest has provided the conditions for armed groups to thrive. Contrary, Inyang (2009) asserted that the proliferation of arms and weapons as a result of the political patronage of the miscreants that were thrown after the elections can indirectly encourage, reinforce and strengthen bandits. These impacts are encouraged within the northwest by ineffectively handled resource clashes between herders and farmers, the illicit mining of gold, declining rustic job bolster, destitute administration, poor management of Nigerian international borders, and inadequate police presence (Ojewale, 2021). According to Akinyetun, Bakare & Oke (2022: 67) banditry is caused by "reinforcing factors such as the inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) from the Sahel and Libya to the Northwest, the absence of efficient security forces, and conflicts over cattle and land ". Some of these factors that necessitated the rise of banditry in Nigeria are briefly explicated below:

a. Ineffective Transhumance – the movement of cattle – is ineffectively controlled. This has seen it being penetrated by criminals, which has driven the heightened cattle rustling within the northern region. In states like Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, and Kebbi, there exists a clan of livestock bandits who practice mass cattle attacks and raids (Okoli, 2019). Frail regulation of pastoral activities has led to an invasion by livestock bandits, driving an increment in cattle rustling within the North West. The sudden escalation of cattle rustling in States like Katsina, Kaduna, and Zamfara, especially since 2010, is due to several interconnected components. These incorporate the clashes between herders and farmers, the commercialization of cattle rustling, the accessibility of arms and weapons, and the emergence of livestock bandits (Ahmadu, 2019). Bandits are also linked to local and transnational organized crime systems and markets for a lot of stolen cattle. Numerous of the rustled cattle have been sold in numerous markets of major Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Maiduguri, etc through criminal intermediaries (Ahmadu, 2019; Afeez, 2019).

b. Inadequate Presence of Police Personnel in Rural Communities – There is a lack of enough police personnel in rural areas especially in the northern region. Nigeria is additionally under-policed, so farmers turned 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 among pastoralists, the vigilantes' reaction has been to target all herder communities, notwithstanding culpability (Hassan, 2021). The pastoralists have reacted with their possess, forest-based – and better-armed – self-defence bunches, which over time have ended up nearly undefined and indistinguishable from the original bandits (Hassan, 2021).

Anyadike (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 colossal populace which makes the country communities for the most part undeserving of police consideration. Or maybe, state governments have turned to vigilantes to form up for the setback, giving them

chasing rifles and motorbikes to stand up to banditry. Be that as it may, due to late and conflicting installment of remittances, a few vigilantes themselves got to be bandits

c. Ineffective Border Control and Proliferation of Arms - In the interim, the permeable borders in Nigeria are however another factor that has expanded the attack of Malians and Nigeriens into Nigeria beneath the pretense of pastoralism. The free unhindered development of individuals from Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso empowers the expansion of advanced weapons and opens up the rate of psychological militant exercises within the northern region of Nigeria (Barnett, 2021; Ojewale, 2021). Nigeria's borders are highly porous coupled with tremendous ungoverned spaces which make it intricate for the country to control its borders and secure its spaces and the result of typically the country's failure to put an end to the proliferation of arms and ammunition into the hands of bandits and criminals (Usman & Singh, 2021:19).

d. Illegal Mining Activities The winning socio-existential conditions in northwestern Nigeria have complicated the security circumstance. The provincial peaceful segment isn't well directed. Illegal artisanal mining and the proliferation of arms within the region are too veritable components (Okoli, 2019). Country banditry in northwestern Nigeria determines the driving force from the ineffectively administered mining and small arms division. Bandits have been drawn to the region by unlawful and artisanal mining in states like Zamfara and Niger where bandits have been attacking mining sites for gold and cash (Okoli, 2019). Consequently, the federal government has perceived the clear linkage between banditry and illegal mining and suspended all forms of mining in Zamfara State in early April 2019 (Okoli, 2019).

e. Large Forest Zones and Ungoverned Spaces - Topography plays a part, as well as in facilitating banditry. Northern Nigeria's forestlands 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 plenitude 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. Hence these ungoverned spaces have created a controlled vacuum that regularly gets filled with felonious bandit gangs (Olaniyan & Yahaya (2016) and Oladejo (2021). The many forests in the northwest, especially the twin forests of Mashema in Zamfara's north bordering the nearby Niger Republic and Birnin Gwari to the south leading to the neighbouring, equally insecure, state of Kaduna, have been a source of weapons for the bandits (Egbejule, 2022).

Again, crime flourishes in settings where there is small discouragement. In most of Nigeria's rural communities, there are numerous openings for criminal movement. For one thing, a few of these communities are found in farther zones where there is small or no government presence. More vitally, families are in a few cases isolated by and blended with forest zones.

This renders them helpless to banditry (Okoli, 2019). This circumstance is made more awful by the nonattendance of viable community policing components capable of tending to the locality's unusual security challenges (Okoli, 2019).

f. Unemployment and Poverty - broad unemployment, extraordinary destitution, and inescapable imbalance (which are common indications within the Northwest) fuel the event of banditry. A few of the poorest states within the nation are found within the northwest region (e.g., Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina states). 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).

2. The Nature of Attacks and Operations of Bandits in Nigeria

According to Okoli & Ugwu (2019), the operational modes of bandits in Nigeria have four dimensions. These dimensions are raids in villages, robberies on highways, abductions, and cattle theft. Village raids are the invasion and looting of rural communities with severe consequences for the population. In most village raids, households, shops, and markets are looting targets. While sometimes, it is seen as a reprisal attack on a rival village (Yaro & Tobias, 2019). The second dimension of banditry is highway robbery, which is a phenomenon in the State. This occurred to the interception of motorists with travelers on the various highways along the Abuja-Kaduna-Zaria and Suleja-Abuja axis (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). The third dimension is abduction. Kidnapping is a crime committed for ransom. Victims of the crime are often those perceived by the perpetrators to possess money that will be paid as ransom based on individual socio-economic status. Kidnapping has taken place in schools and highways. Kidnapping on the roads across Nigeria involves highway-armed abduction whereby travelers are ambushed and abducted by bandits and then taken to a hideout in the forest where their relatives or associates are contacted for ransom payment (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). The last dimension of banditry in Nigeria especially in the northern states is cattle rustling. This is a form of organized cattle theft driven by allied accumulative or profiteering inclinations. In other words, they are criminal gangs engaging in organized rural banditry to profit from livestock theft (Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduehe & Dariya, 2018; Asmau & Abdulrasheed, 2020).

Bandits", the catchall phrase for criminal gangs masterminding frequent bouts of abduction, maiming, sexual violence, and killings of citizens across vast swaths of northern Nigeria (Egbejule, 2022). Bandits are a group of criminal gangs that operate primarily in areas where the government is limited (Ojewale, 2021). In what appears lately as shifting geography of violence, bandit attacks have been concentrated in villages and peri-urban areas of major towns and cities in northern states (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022). The violent operations of bandits, typically involve scores of gunmen on motorbikes sweeping into villages, shooting all the young men they can find on the assumption they belong to local vigilantes, and then carting away livestock and anything else of value (Hassan, 2021).

Over the last decade, groups of armed bandits have kidnapped, tortured, and killed hundreds of people across northern states of Nigeria, demanding ransoms and looting citizens, rich and poor (Gimba, 2022). In some communities, bandits freely operate a quasi-government, imposing levies on communities and demanding money as a condition for civilians to access their farms and communities (Musa, 2021). These bandits number in the tens of thousands but go around in dozens, sometimes more, and go about unchallenged, they invade villages and communities mostly on motorcycles – and sometimes on horses, and always well-armed (Gimba, 2022). They also often announce their presence by straddling mainly motorcycles – and sometimes horses – in towns and villages that they invade, with an unending supply of ammunition (Egbejule, 2022).

The raids are increasingly daring. In the last few months, bandits have downed an air force jet; attacked the military's officer training school; struck a prestige commuter rail service running between the capital, Abuja, and the city of Kaduna; and kidnapped students for ransom from schools and colleges so many times that education is now in peril (Hassan, 2021). Recently, bandits have become emboldened and carried out strategic attacks on the nation's foremost defense academy in Kaduna and a military base in Zamfara state. On both occasions, 14 officers were killed, one abducted and military weapons were carted away. These isolated cases marked a major setback in the campaign to curb violent crimes across contiguous states (Ojewale, 2021).

On 24 August 2021, bandits attacked the Nigerian Defence Academy, killing two officers and abducting another (Musa, 2021). In October 2021, they failed to stop a train after it laid explosives on its tracks. Witnesses say that time, the train hobbled on to its destination afterward. But five months later, they hit the bull's eye. On the same route, on Monday, March 28, 2022, they stopped one heading for Kaduna from Abuja by bombing its tracks and shooting sporadically into it, forcing it to come to a halt. They killed many passengers and abducted dozens. Less than a week earlier, they had stormed the Kaduna airport, killing an official on the runway. Monday's train attack was the second in six months last October (Gimba 2022). In December 2021 over 40 persons were kidnapped in Wurno, a small local government area in Sokoto state. On 6 December 2021, 23 persons died after bandits shot at a bus carrying travellers from Sokoto to Kaduna in an attack at Gidan Bawa village in Isa local government area of Sokoto State (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022)

For about a century, little groups of cattle rustlers have been attacking villages within the north for cattle and foodstuff. That has regularly driven them into coordinated strife with farmers and other local people in these areas. In any case, around 2011, things changed as a spate of equipped assaults started in Zamfara state and quickly heightens. Specialists say the artisanal mining operations there had pulled in gold cheats who at that point started ravaging the towns at night (Egbejule, 2022). Currently, Zamfara state is at the centre of the banditry. It tops the country's league table of violent deaths, with 495 reported killings between July and October 2021. That's far more fatalities than in northeastern Borno – where ISWAP and Boko Haram operate (Hassan, 2021). There are many bandit groups believed to be made up mostly of Fulanis from the north, including pastoralists and

mercenaries from neighboring Chad and the Niger Republic (Egbejule, 2022). Estimates put the number of bandits at about 30,000, spread across scores of gangs ranging in size from 10 fighters to over a thousand in the northern region of Nigeria (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022). Bandits have been kidnapping civilians for ransom to finance their operations. Since January 2021, there have been 10 cases of abduction of school children involving over 1,000 students. In recent years, improvised vehicle checkpoints have been used to abduct commuters in northern Nigeria. In addition, many rural communities have been invaded for the sole purpose of abducting and looting residents. According to ACLED data, bandits killed over 2,600 civilians in 2021, an increase of over 250% from 2020. This number dwarfs the civilian deaths credited to Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the same year. Between December 2020 and August 2021, over 1,000 students and school staff were kidnapped. Six months after the incident, 343 people were killed by bandits, while 830 others were abducted by them between July and September 2021 (Musa, 2021; Gimba 2022).

On numerous occasions, bandits have abducted schoolchildren in different parts of the northern region of Nigeria, especially in Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Kebbi, and Yobe states. Others who were kidnapped for ransom by the group include members of all social classes, from politicians and their families to imams, clergymen, security guards, and farmers (Egbejule, 2022). The kidnapping of people for ransom is becoming a lucrative business in the North West region, especially among the many unemployed youths. Many residents complain that the armed banditry groups storm their communities during the daytime to steal cattle or kidnap people. The bandits have realized that kidnapping ordinary villagers is not as profitable as kidnapping people traveling on transportation routes or schools (Mohammed, 2021).

Consequently, the region has witnessed at least six kidnappings of school children and university students between December 2020 to June 2021. For example over 300 students were abducted by bandits on December 6, 2020, from Government Science Secondary School students, Kankara, Katsina State, and over 80 Islamic schools (*Islamiyya*) students were abducted by bandits on December 19, 2020, from Dandume, Katsina State, about 317 schoolgirls were kidnapped on January 15, 2021, from Jangebe, Zamfara State, 39 students were abducted by bandits on March 15, 2021, from the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization in Mando, Kaduna State, 19 students of Greenfield University in Kaduna State were abducted by bandits on April 23, 2021, one student was killed and eight people, including lecturers and students, were abducted by bandits on June 10, 2021, from Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic in Zaria, Kaduna State, 102 students were abducted by bandits on June 17, 2021, from Federal Government College in Birnin Yawuri, Kebbi State (Daily Trust, January 6, 2021; Punch, June 11, 2021; The Nation, June 19, 2021; Mohammed, 2021).

3. The Consequences of Banditry on National Security in Nigeria

Banditry is on the rise in Nigeria and it poses a serious security threat not only to Northwest and North Central regions but to Nigeria as a whole. The level at which bandits operate

within the landscape of Nigeria's northern region has led to a spree of kidnapping, maiming of people, loss of lives, population displacements, loss of cattle, and disruption of socio-economic activities. This situation has become worrisome to the government and the citizenry (Gimba, 2022). The sheer humanitarian consequences of these attacks remain alarming. Since 2011, nearly 200,000 people have been displaced within the region, and an official report shows that at least 6,319 people were killed, 3,672 were kidnapped and more than 500 villages were burnt by bandits in Zamfara from 2011 to 2019. Over 6,000 persons were also injured from bandit activities, with more than 250,000 cows rustled, over 3,000 hectares of arable land, more than 600 commercial stores, and 336 vehicles destroyed (Ojewale, 2021).

Suffice it to say that armed banditry has come with telling consequences in Nigeria. "While the fundamental element of every society, including security, safety, livelihood, and standard of living has become crippled as a result of armed banditry, it also contributes to the weakening of the state; especially the sovereignty of the Nigerian state to provide for its citizens as enshrined in the constitution and the social contract and the long run it would lead to the collapse of the state," (Mac-Leva, 2021)

The number of fatalities caused by bandits increased social risks, discouraging investment and triggering an economic crisis for individuals and communities. The conflict is causing a ripple effect throughout neighboring communities and local government areas in Niger State in the North-Central region, hampering trade between communities and states (Ojah, 2019). The insecurity has a significant impact on other economic activities in the region, as several major local markets such as Illella, Dandume, Maidabino, Kankara (Katsina State), and Bardoki, Shinkafi (Zamfara State) markets have been shut down due to incessant attacks (Ojah, 2019).

Umaru (2020) opines that banditry has negatively impacted food and human security and has subjected the victims to violence, abuse, fear, and unnecessary want. Bashir (2021) submits that there is a general case of human rights violation wherever bandits attack. In addition to its economic and political effects, the psychological impact of banditry on the victims of rape, abuse, arson, and kidnap remains untold (Akinyetun, Bakare & Oke, 2022: 70). Some of the consequences of banditry are briefly explained below:

a. Increased the incidence of Unemployment and Poverty - Banditry has also increased the incidence of poverty in the Northwest. The north is a generally poor region compared to other regions of the country when applying the dimensions of multidimensional poverty (living standard, education, and health). Concerning the living standard, banditry has deprived victims of the goods, property, and businesses required for economic sustenance. The subsistence and commercial efforts of herders/farmers have been thwarted while a majority of these herders/farmers have been forced to abandon their farmlands, cattle, and livestock. This intensifies the prevalence of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, and social exclusion in the north (Akinyetun, Bakare & Oke, 2022).

b. Displacement of Residents - Banditry has led to the displacement of residents of Northwest Nigeria in their thousands to the Republic of Niger while others are scattered

around Internally Displaced Camps; most of which are lacking in quality, without access to potable water, health care, basic utensils, toilets, and sleeping materials. The majority of these IDPs have therefore resorted to begging to make a living (ACAPS, 2020). It has been estimated that by March 2020, more than 210,000 people have been internally displaced while over 35,000 refugees have crossed communal borders to Maradi in Niger Republic by the beginning of March 2020 (Mac-Leva, 2021). Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities are scrambling for scarce resources such as water, land, and food (Mac-Leva, 2021). Egwu (2016) affirms that banditry has created a humanitarian tragedy with far-reaching consequences for an increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs), forced migrations, deaths and cattle rustling.

Banditry has further created an unprecedented rural-urban drift wherein residents of affected communities have had to desert their homes and relocate to urban areas for fear of being attacked again by bandits (Akinyetun, Bakare & Oke, 2022). Health Risks at IDP - Due to the lack of safe water and poor sanitation occasioned by open defecation, overcrowdedness, and poor toilet facilities, displaced persons run the risk of diarrhoea and cholera outbreaks in their respective camps (ACAPS, 2020). Concerning health, the consequent displacement that trails bandit attacks has exposed victims to health risks such as cholera, whilst forcing them to violate Covid-19 health guidelines (Bashir, 2021).

c. Disruption in Socio-economic Activities - According to Igbini (2020), banditry has deteriorated the social, economic, and political activities in the country generally, and the Northwest in particular. It has discouraged economic activities such as trading, farming, mining, and foreign investment. livelihoods have been disrupted, while fear and insecurity among the population have intensified (Mac-Leva, 2021).

d. Food Insecurity - banditry violence has hampered agricultural activities and heightened the risk of acute food insecurity (Mac-Leva, 2021). Banditry activities are precipitating food insecurity – a threat highlighted by President Buhari as food prices grow at the fastest pace in more than 15 years (Ojewale, 2021). Banditry and other security challenges have triggered a food emergency across the northwest, with over 450,000 people fleeing farms and rural markets. The US government's Famine Early Warning Systems Network, known as FEWS NET, has predicted "catastrophe" levels of hunger in parts of the region – which means famine for some households (Hassan, 2021). Given that farming and animal rearing is the mainstay of the economy in the northwest, cattle rustling has significantly impaired animal rearing. More so, the attacks on rural villagers and farmers, and the consequent displacement of many more, have made farming, cultivation, and harvest impossible. These developments increase the chances of food insufficiency, food insecurity, poverty, hunger, and malnutrition (ACAPS, 2020).

e. Reduces Foreign Direct Investment - The incident of kidnapping and banditry has affected the image of the country both domestically and internationally as a nation. It has affected Nigeria's quest to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and also an attempt to develop a viable tourism industry as visitors are regularly warned by their countries to be wary of coming to Nigeria (Chukwueme, Phinos & Agaba, 2019:230). The high rate of

kidnapping and banditry in certain areas of the country has made such areas a high-risk zone for foreigners. This scares away foreign investors from investing in that region, as can be seen in the north of Nigeria where Boko Haram and banditry is operating everywhere. (Chukwueme, Phinos & Agaba, 2019).

f. Declined in Students Enrolment in Schools - Regarding education, the abduction of school children by bandits has forced many nearby schools to close down while the ones in operation have recorded fewer students for fear of kidnap. This further increases the level of illiteracy and out-of-school children in the north (Akinyetun, Bakare & Oke, 2022). According to Orjinmo (2021), "the bandits, motivated by money, might be ideologically different from groups like Boko Haram in the north-east, which are against secular education, but together, they are having a devastating effect on education across northern Nigeria" (Orjinmo, 2021:2).

g. General Security Challenges in Nigeria - The rising death toll as a result of banditry coupled with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the north created a security challenge to the general society. Small arms and light weapons fuel organized criminal violence, cattle rustling, kidnapping, and other terrorist activities which undermine the general development of society. In addition, Insecurity in Nigeria due to banditry becomes a cause of concern for the general public as all are affected by it. Schools, Homes, Markets, Mosques, Churches, and Highways are prone to the menace of banditry (Usman & Singh, 2021).

Therefore, the security of the country, in general, is indeed irritating, particularly in the Northern part of Nigeria. The security condition has deteriorated, and despite the serious brutality caused by the activities of Boko Haram, the region continues to suffer from the menace of banditry (Usman & Singh, 2021). More worrisome, bandits and other unknown gunmen continue to cause serious havoc on helpless citizens in Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Nassarawa, Benue, and Niger states which extended to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja (Usman & Singh, 2021). Consequently, Nigeria's National Security Strategy shows that banditry constitutes about 40% of national insecurity in Nigeria (Ojewale, 2021).

4. The Efforts of Nigerian Governments in Mitigating Banditry in Nigeria

The incidence and prevalence of rural banditry in the northwest and north-central regions of Nigeria raises a fundamental question about the government's ability to govern effectively (Okoli, 2019). Currently, banditry has become the order of the day because of the government's inability to protect lives and property as well as its failure to put the welfare of the people first (Emmanuel, 2020).

However, the Nigerian government has responded at both state and federal levels to address the issue of banditry and insecurity in the country. The initial reaction was the bombardments of the various abodes of the bandits by the military and police under different code names, but this did not yield much significant result (Emmanuel, 2020). The

state governments have also tried to negotiate and give amnesty to repentant bandits. While this initially worked, the result did not last (Emmanuel, 2020).

For instance, the Nigerian government has launched multiple military operations in the northern region to curtail the banditry menace from 2019 to the present, including Operation Harbin Kunama and Exercise Sahel Sanity. The military operation Exercise Sahel Sanity, headquartered at the Special Army Super Camp IV in Faskari, Katsina state, led to the killing of 220 bandits and the rescue of 642 kidnapped victims from captivity. The troops also destroyed 197 bandits' enclaves, killed the notorious armed leader called "Dangote" of the eponymous "Dangote Triangle" in Katsina, and arrested 335 suspected bandits and 326 illegal miners in Kebbi, Kaduna, Niger, Zamfara, and Katsina states (This Day, January 12, 2021; Mohammed, 2021). A new military offensive was launched in Zamfara in September 2021, combined with a telecommunications blackout, and bans on the sale of fuel in jerry cans to try to blunt the bandits' mobility. But the measures have simply pushed the bandits into neighbouring states (Hassan, 2021).

Thus, the Nigeria state has employed numerous strategies to put an end to banditry through its security agencies, by establishing several operations leading to the arrest of many culprits and seizure of numerous weapons from armed bandits, yet the problem continued to spread like wildfire which poses threat to Nigeria's national security (Usman & Singh, 2021). The state security machinery has so far failed to tackle the scourge of banditry. This failure stems from a lack of political will and operational challenges (Okoli, 2019).

As banditry attacks have continued, the affected population has expressed a lack of trust in the army and police and their ability to prevent the reoccurrence of this ugly development. Residents and survivors in affected states have complained that responses from the police and army were slow, and sometimes non-existent when they are attacked (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Consequently, numerous victims of the civilian populations believed that the military are complicit, unwilling, or unable to secure them. They distrust the military and are unwilling to share information or collaborate with them (Musa, 2021). However, the military could remedy this impression by rescuing kidnapped victims and responding swiftly when communities offer early warning information or come under attack (Musa, 2021). This would increase the likelihood of reporting incidents to security forces, decrease the likelihood of civilians paying a ransom, and make criminal abduction for ransom less lucrative. Conversely, all these require political will, which appears to be lacking (Musa, 2021).

The atrocities and motivation of the bandits have assumed an insurgent-type criminality. However, the government was initially reluctant to label the bandit groups as terrorists or insurgents. Consequently, President Muhammadu Buhari was accused of sympathizing with the bandits, who appeared to be of his ethnic affiliation. He was accused of emboldening the bandit groups over his quest to reclaim and reestablish grazing routes despite the open rejection of open grazing by half of Nigeria's 36 state governors (Musa, 2021). Critics argued that his lopsided appointments of mostly northerners like himself,

against the constitutional federal character principle, explicate his failure to take a tough stance against the attacks on Nigerians by the Fulani bandits (Musa, 2021). After so many outcries, finally, in January 2022, the Federal Government proscribed the bandits as terrorists (Egbejule, 2022). In the official gazette, President Muhammadu Buhari's government labeled the activities of Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda – references in the Hausa language to bandit gunmen – "as acts of terrorism and illegality (Egbejule, 2022).

Declaring the bandits as terrorists is necessary to ensure that the requisite level of force, tactical and operational assets, and resources are deployed against the groups (Musa, 2021). But the designation of bandits as terrorists has barely changed anything. Days after the announcement of bandits as terrorists, an estimated 200 people were killed and 10,000 displaced in attacks by bandits in Zamfara (Egbejule, 2022). Thus, in its bid to contain the bandits, the government has declared them "terrorists. However, bandits have continued to wax stronger and bolder in their fight against the people and state, giving rise to security reports that they are the same as Boko Haram (Gimba, 2022).

The military appears unable to counter the threats or conduct significant rescue efforts. Recent attempts relied heavily on the aerial bombardment, which tends to lack precision. This has resulted in civilian casualties and has failed to produce significant results (Musa, 2021). The military's air raids have yielded insignificant results because they lack coordinated support from ground troops (Musa, 2021). Roughly 10 military operations have been launched against banditry in the northwest so far, but they have failed to make a dent in the insecurity. The mobile gangs take advantage of a forested, sparsely populated region, and when attacked, simply move elsewhere (Hassan, 2021). Despite government efforts, Nigeria's security situation is fast deteriorating (Ojewale, 2021).

Notwithstanding, there are salient reasons why government interventions are not yielding fruit to date. A major factor is the topography of the area. The terrain is such that security presence is virtually unavailable for most people in the area particularly, those living in remote areas. It takes hours sometimes for security personnel to respond to distress calls of victims (WANEP, 2020). This is further propelled by the massive forests surrounding the areas which are shielding the bandits from being easily captured especially as they make use of forests such as the Falgore, Kamara, Kunduma, Subudu, Kamuku, and Kiyanbana forests. This makes it difficult for the military to secure the lives and property of the people residing in the areas, especially without modern technology systems (WANEP, 2020).

To stem banditry, some state governments have turned to peace deals to essentially buy off the gunmen. The model amnesty deals and development programmes to end attacks by bandits have been initiated by some state governors in the north. But that approach has had mixed results. For instance, the Zamfara state governor introduced an amnesty and cash-for-guns scheme in 2016. Initially, it seemed to work, but it fell apart two years later with the death of warlord Buharin Daji, the lynchpin of the deal (Hassan, 2021). Zamfara tried again in 2020. This time, the new governor, Bello Matawalle, offered cows in return for guns (to avoid monetizing the violence). He also ordered the disarmament of the Yan Sakai and pledged to construct Rural Grazing Areas – settlements with dams and veterinary

services set aside for pastoralists. But the attacks continued, and Matawalle made a U-turn in September 2021, cancelling further dialogue (Hassan, 2021). It has been the same story in Katsina, the home state of President Muhammadu Buhari, with peace deals never properly sticking. Yet pastoralists in both Zamfara and Katsina also point out that governments have failed to deliver on the development promises they made (Hassan, 2021).

In July 2020, the Secretary to the Katsina State Government announced that Katsina State had spent about \$73,000 (or 30 million Nigerian nairas) on an amnesty program for repentant bandits and cattle rustlers before it collapsed. He further stated that the reason for the collapse of the peace deal was the bandits kept reneging on agreements and betraying their promises to the government (Premium Times. ng, June 3, 2020; the cable. ng, July 7, 2020) (Mohammed, 2021). Some states, led by Kaduna and Niger, have taken a far harder line by refusing to negotiate over ransom demands or amnesties. But they have not fared any better, with a string of high-profile student abductions that has forced the closure of schools (Hassan, 2021).

Private mediation has also been tried. The most prominent was by Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, the leader of the influential Izala Islamic sect. He held a series of forest meetings with bandits, arguing that their grievances should be taken seriously and would need the kind of political and financial investment that ended the Delta crisis (Hassan, 2021). Both Matawalle, the Zamfara governor, and Gumi, the cleric, have argued that among the bandits are the self-defence groups that took up arms to defend pastoralist communities against the Yan Sakai – and to protest government neglect – and these are the men the amnesties and promises of development spending aim to reach (Hassan, 2021). But regardless of government intentions, the problem is that the peace accords negotiated so far are badly flawed and amateurishly executed (Hassan, 2021).

The Katsina and Zamfara state governments have also employed the services of non-state actors, like vigilante groups and Yan Sakai (Security Volunteers), to curtail the conflict. Although they possess knowledgeable insights and an understanding of the local conflict, they are not without their negative sides. For example, some of the vigilante members have seized on the opportunity stemming from the conflict to attack personal enemies (Mohammed, 2021). As a result, some state governments halted monthly payments of salaries to vigilantes and ethnic militias – whom they had tasked with fighting the bandits and struck disarmament deals to collect the weapons paid for with government funds. Disgruntled members of these groups are now also in the mix (Egbejule, 2022).

Combating Banditry in Nigeria: The Way Forward

As banditry in the northern region of Nigeria accelerates with country-wide effects, policy solutions must be multipronged. While the government's strategic military operation is commendable, however, policing and targeted socio-economic interventions to ameliorate poverty are critical to addressing a rapidly worsening situation (Ojewale, 2021). There's no more effective solution than forceful inland and frontier policing. Such policing must deal

with the region's peculiar circumstances of diverse borderlines, forestlands, and hinterlands. This requires a tactical synergy between grassroots vigilantes and state security operatives (Okoli, 2019)

The federal government's current counter-banditry effort, based on military reconnaissance and raids, is good and commendable. But it has failed to bring about the needed respite, owing largely to the operational challenges arising from insufficient knowledge of the terrain. This makes the involvement of local vigilantes and community watch groups, who have a better knowledge of the terrain, more important (Okoli, 2019). However, to guard against possible excesses and abuse, people in these structures must be properly trained, equipped, and supervised. The way forward, then, is the development of grassroots policing, enriched by local personnel and intelligence (Okoli, 2019).

According to Akinyetun (2022), it has been established that banditry is a situational crime necessitated by the interplay of the person, setting, situation, and action. As such, banditry in Nigeria is sustained by the interaction between a person's experience and prevailing economic realities, such as poverty and unemployment (environment or setting). Furthermore, banditry is encouraged by a weak security apparatus in large under-governed spaces, which is part of the setting, and characterised by illegal mining and cattle rustling (action). As banditry is conceived of as a situational crime, a situational solution is required to curb it (Akinyetun, 2022).

However, banditry in northern Nigeria will be difficult to resolve if the government continues with its current strategy without considering the various factors involved in the conflict. First, explosive population growth and climate change in Nigeria are exacerbating economic anxiety and fomenting lawlessness, especially in communities bordering Niger (Mohammed, 2021). Moreover, there are unchecked border crossings between herder tribes, as there is virtually no restriction on movements in these border areas. Anyone in Niger can come to Nigeria, commit any crime, and go back to Niger (Mohammed, 2021). Furthermore, corruption plays a significant role as some security agencies collect bribes from Nigeriens and grant them access to Nigeria without a proper investigation (Mohammed, 2021).

Therefore, to address the challenges of banditry, this paper suggests some measures as stated below:

a. Decentralization of Policing - The policy solutions to banditry in the northern part of Nigeria must be multipronged. While the occasional military operation is commendable, policing remains critical to rolling back their proliferation. An extensive review and amendment of section 214 of the 1999 constitution must take place, which centralizes policing power within the federal government. Decentralized policing can create a system of a localized and community-focused policing system that affords communities organizational, operational, and human resources input into the policing outfits that secure communities (Ojewale, 2021)

b. Socio-Economic Intervention - National and subnational governments must also prioritize targeted socio-economic interventions to ameliorate poverty and a lack of

opportunities. Some affected states have the worst governance indicators in Nigeria, highlighting the role of unemployment, poverty, and climate change in worsening the crisis. Mass investment in agriculture, infrastructure, education, and other avenues to increase youth employment is sine-qua-non to solving these problems (Ojewale, 2021)

c. Review ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance - The ECOWAS protocol on transhumance should be reviewed by putting into consideration the increasing regional conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, and associated linkages. According to the evolution of banditry in northern Nigeria, the ECOWAS Protocol on transhumance, after two decades of operation, needs technical revisions. However, its original spirit should be maintained (Ojewale, 2021).

d. Tackle Unemployment and Poverty- The northern states are facing almost the same problem of banditry and should work together, formulate common policies, and collectively use their humongous security votes to protect their residents and not only their families (Feyisipo, 2021). They should frantically tackle unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy which are the tripod upon which banditry has been nurtured to their monstrous nature. For example, the statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics in the last quarter of 2020, shows that Katsina alone has 25.5percent unemployment rate of about 438,808 people unemployed; Jigawa has 565,978 (38.69%), Kaduna has 1,111,091 (44.35%), Kano has 717,086 (25.5%) while Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara have 213, 570 (17.25%), 162,349 (14.48%), 202, 568 (12.9%) respectively.

e. Stop the Payment of Ransom: Nigerians are paying ransom to bandit groups because they have seemingly lost interest in security intermediations whom they sometimes see as collaborators and informants to the bandit groups. However, the paying of ransoms is motivating more bandits to join the kidnapping business because it involves millions of dollars and the government has failed to stop the insecurity (Daily Trust, May 24). Some have even accused the government of sponsoring insecurity indirectly by paying ransoms (Mohammed, 2021). According to this perspective, a government serious about tackling the issue of banditry would not pay any money to criminal armed groups in the form of ransom for kidnappings because it is an offence against citizens that require proactive and prompt security operatives to curb (Mohammed, 2021).

f. Tackle the Main Causes of Violence and Banditry: The security stick doesn't address the root causes of the violence. Land disputes are a key issue: Expanding farms have encroached on the routes and cattle reserves used by pastoralists, resulting in friction – on both sides – when fields are trampled. Local authorities are seen to have failed to fairly adjudicate these conflicts (Hassan, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the implication of rising banditry on national security in Nigeria. This study has shown that the menace of banditry is worrisome and overwhelming. Banditry has imposed a serious security challenge on Nigeria as a nation, especially in the northern region. There have been high incidences of banditry attacks on farm settlements,

villages, and highways resulting in kidnapping, killings, cattle rustling, displacement, loss of properties, and other security challenges in the northern region. All these have further increased the level of poverty, unemployment, hunger, school dropout, food insecurity, and humanitarian crisis in the region. Notwithstanding, there are different factors necessitating the rise of banditry in recent times some of these factors include unemployment, weak security system, poverty, the porosity of Nigeria's borders, arms proliferation, illegal mining activities, and the presence of large ungoverned spaces which serve as hideouts to the bandits. To drastically address banditry, the following measures or recommendations should be adopted:

1. The Federal Government should decentralize policing system to localized and adopt a community-focused policing system that affords the community's organizational, operational, and human resources input into the policing outfits that secure communities.
2. Both Federal and State Governments should prioritize targeted socio-economic interventions to ameliorate poverty and a lack of opportunities in Nigeria especially in the Northern region which is highly bedeviled with different insecurity challenges.
3. Governments at all levels should stop the payment of ransom to bandits and they should drastically tackle the cause of rising banditry in Nigeria
4. Federal and State Governments should frantically tackle unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy which are the tripod upon which banditry has been nurtured to their monstrous nature.

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