

Analysis of the Nature and Patterns of Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Banditry has become a major security issue in Nigeria. In the northwestern region- the nucleus of the phenomenon of banditry in the country, devastating attacks by bandits on rural communities has taken many forms; such that a specific and concise categorization of the phenomenon has been rather elusive. This paper examines the nature and patterns of banditry in Nigeria with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The paper begins by examining the conceptual and historical contexts of the phenomenon. It then goes on to demonstrate how given the socio-economic and political character of banditry, the state is complicit in the construction and interpretation of the phenomenon. Finally, the paper argues that, to effectively address the phenomenon of banditry, a deliberate process of “social reengineering” which address the socio-economic and political factors that have spawned the phenomenon is crucial.

Keywords: bandits, banditry, Northwest Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is mired in a complex and dynamic crisis of insecurity which has evolved across space and time. In the southern part of the country, separatist agitations steeped in personalized and identity politics have over the years been at the center of controversies and violent conflicts. In the north, insurgency and banditry have posed fundamental security challenges in an unconventional confrontation with the Nigerian state;

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and in the face of these challenges, the response of successive Nigerian governments has been reactionary and repressive; unwittingly ensuring the dynamism and continuation of these security challenges in an unending cycle of insurgent and counter-insurgent operations (Moveh, 2017).

Within the past decade, banditry in particular, has posed increasing challenges to the Nigerian state thereby attracting national and international attention. Extant studies such as Kuna and Ibrahim (2016) demonstrate how a situation of anomie arising from the collapse of government and the absence of law and order has led to the degeneration of the problem of banditry in the country. In the Northwest region of Nigeria—the nucleus of the phenomenon of banditry in the country, devastating attacks by bandits on rural communities have taken many forms, such that a specific and concise categorization of the phenomenon has been rather elusive. While violent criminality and lawlessness are general attributes of banditry, the nature and patterns of the phenomenon appears elastic, encompassing a wide range of criminal acts such as: cattle rustling, kidnaping for ransom and rape, farmers-herders conflicts, and armed robbery (Okoli, 2019). Indeed, the bandits seemingly change their tactics in response to exigencies and the prevailing socio-economic and political contexts.

This paper examines the nature and patterns of banditry in Nigeria with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and also to provide a context for predicting the manner in which the phenomenon is likely to develop. Such an undertaking is considered imperative as a precondition for effective counter measures. Qualitative data, derived from extensive desk research and interviews conducted with ex-bandits is employed in the analysis and discussion. The location of the authors in the northwest and their experiences as independent researchers and intelligence officers also provided useful insights on the issue of banditry in the northwest. A deductive approach involving reasoning from a general historicisation and conceptualisation of the concept of banditry to the specificities of the Nigerian case is employed in the analysis. The paper is

divided into five sections. Following this introduction is a presentation of a conceptual and historical contexts of the phenomenon of banditry in general. The third section discusses the nature and patterns of banditry with specific reference to Nigeria's Northwest region. The fourth section examines the causes of banditry and the Nigerian government's response to the phenomenon, while the fifth section is the summary, conclusion and recommendation.

Bandits and Banditry: A Conceptual and Historical Overview

A number of issues are germane in any study on the nature and patterns of banditry. These issues include: what social category are referred to as bandits? what is their stock in trade, and what motivates them? While these questions are critical in understanding the phenomenon of banditry generally, they have remained somewhat unresolved in the case of Nigeria. Indeed, scholars like (Okoli and Ugwu: 2019, Kuna and Ibrahim: 2016) have only recently began to focus on the phenomenon of banditry in Nigeria; with a view to shedding more light on its causes, the actors involved, their motivations, the scale of the phenomenon and its strategic implications.

A bandit generally, is a member of an unlawful armed group -a marauding band, engaged in criminality mostly at the country side. Historically, bandits are usually proscribed or outlawed brigands who engage in criminality in the fringes of the society. As a derivative of the term bandit, the concept of banditry is used in describing the activities of bandits. Banditry has a long history as a raptorial phenomenon, dating from ancient Greece, China and Rome (Cassia, 2018). The phenomenon historically describes a pernicious form of crime that subverts the state's monopoly of legitimate violence. Within this context, banditry involves the attempt at resisting the civilizing power of the state through violence, brutality, extortion and theft. Indeed, the phenomenon of banditry has over the years been historically linked to certain prevailing political and socio-economic contexts. For example, in central and eastern Europe as well as in the Balkans, banditry existed in the countryside under specific conditions; such as during periods of widespread social dislocations

associated with the formation of the modern state system in the late 18th and 19th century (Cassia, 2018). The organization and solidarity of bandits historically, also tended to be on the basis of real and imagined kinship ties which were reinforced through the institutions of blood brotherhood and adoption, as well as through feasting and other rituals (Cassia, 2018).

In agrarian China, the influence of famine and the subsequent hardship on the rise of banditry is well documented. Peasants had to make a “rational choice” between enduring harsh conditions and surviving through illegal activities of banditry (James, 1991). Postconflict periods were also a typical setting for the occurrence of banditry; as veterans were recorded to have often roamed the country in predatory groups that some peasants referred to as bandits or brigands. A typical example of banditry in post-conflict periods occurred during the French revolution. The so called “chauffeurs” for example around the time of the revolution were the first large bands of discharged mercenary soldiers who pillaged remote rural dwellings in the French countryside. While banditry as an outcome of social instability declined across most parts of Europe due to firmer policing and changes in military recruitment and policies toward veterans, echoes persist, for example in the formation of criminal groups in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 (Cassia, 2018).

Banditry can also be seen as an aggressive form of illegal adventurist capital accumulation found in certain social contexts, especially those marked by insecurity and violence; in this sense, it is a product of political economy. Indeed, going by its *modus operandi* which includes forcefully taking over private property, the act of banditry can be seen to be as old as private property itself. The social crises associated with the evolution of new forms of property relations in western Europe in the 18th and 19th century for example accentuated the phenomenon of banditry; particularly along the Mediterranean regions. In the southern part of the America, banditry was part and parcel of an expanding frontier economy. The phenomenon tended to emerge in remote; difficult to control mountainous areas containing large numbers of semimobile and state-resistant pastoralists (Cassia, 2018).

As opposed to being an entirely criminal or exploitative enterprise, Hobsbawm (2010) advanced a novel characterization of “social bandits” to describe the class struggle inherent in the phenomenon of banditry. He argues:

The point about “social bandits” is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported. This relation between the ordinary peasant and the rebel, outlaw and robber is what makes social banditry interesting and significant (Hobsbawm 2010).

Hobsbawm’s concept of “social banditry” has been criticized for being based primarily on fictional literature and printed sources inspired by folklore which reflects mostly a writer’s imagination and the reading public taste for blood and gore (Slatta, 2004). Yet, the concept of “Social banditry” has also been acknowledged as a widespread phenomenon that has occurred in many societies throughout recorded history, and forms of social banditry still exist, as evidenced by piracy and organized crime syndicates. Indeed, later social scientists like Cassia, 2018, have also discussed the term’s applicability to more modern forms of crime, like street gangs and the economy associated with the trade in illegal drugs.

A general theory from the forgoing historical overview of banditry across the globe is that social breakdown is a constant stimulus for brigandage within the society. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to state that as a form of social behavior, banditry employs various forms violence to generate terror for personal ends. As a political and legal category, banditry is formed essentially by the alienation of locals by the state. It is also instructive to note that the meaning of the concept of banditry can change to reflect the social dynamics birthing the phenomenon. While from the perspective of the state, banditry is usually seen as a kind of violent insurrection, for locals and alienated groups banditry may be

considered as a legitimate course for socio-economic emancipation. Thus, the phenomenon exists between the state-imposed system of law and social order on one hand, and the local system of vengeance and grassroots conceptions of justice on the other. It is a specific form of arbitrary personal prepotency and agency with its own “aesthetic” and accompanying discourses, thriving on, and constituting itself through a complex array of symbols. Indeed, the manner in which authorities have responded to this form of prepotency (either through repression or co-optation of strongmen) has itself influenced the responses to banditry at the local level (Cassia, 2018). The state is therefore complicit in the construction and interpretation of banditry.

The Nature and Patterns of Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

Nigeria's Northwestern region, one of the country's six geopolitical zones, comprises seven of the country's 36 states. These are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. It covers an area of 216,065 sq km or 25.75 percent of the country's total land mass. Its major ethnic groups are the Hausa and Fulani, who historically share strong cultural ties and are very much intermixed, with other smaller groups especially in Kaduna state. The region's estimated population of 33 million is predominantly Muslim (Sunni) and a significant part of the population (about 80 percent) are farmers, pastoralists, agro-pastoralists or small-scale entrepreneurs. The Northwest region also has substantial solid mineral deposits, including gold exploited by artisanal miners in open pit mines. Despite its economic potential, the Northwest has the highest poverty rate in Nigeria. As of 2019, all seven states in the zone had poverty levels above the national average of 40.1 percent, led by Sokoto (87.7 percent), Jigawa (87 percent) and Zamfara (74 percent) (NBS, 2019). Millions of the people within the region also lack access to basic health care and clean water. Indeed, the deplorable social conditions of the Northwestern region has provided a fertile ground for banditry to thrive.

Banditry in the Northwestern region of Nigeria started around 2011 in Zamfara state as a traditional farmer-herder conflict (Rufai, 2021). At

inception, banditry essentially involved incidences of cattle rustling. Over the years, other allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, village or market raids and gender based violence ensued. The strategy of the bandits involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons in order to rob, rape or kill (Okoli & Okpaleke 2014). As noted by Shalangwa (2013) banditry in Nigeria is the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals. Indeed, as was the case with the European experience, the bandits operating in Nigeria's Northwest 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. According to ACAPS (2022) a non-profit and non-governmental based humanitarian organization, since 2011 bandits have jeopardized the livelihoods of about 21 million people living in the entire northwestern region. In Zamfara state alone, the authorities estimate that as at 2019 there were over 10,000 bandits in over 40 camps across the state (Rufai 2021). Table 1 presents some of the most notable bandit gang leaders in Zamfara state and the sizes of their groups.

Table 1: Major bandit groups in Zamfara

	Bandit gang/leaders	No.
	Maradun LGA	
1	Sama'ila of Bayan Dutsi	150
2	Jimmo Fadama of Bayan Ruwa	80
3	Simoli Jaya of Bayan Ruwa	65
4	Sahabi of Bayan Ruwa	250
5	Na'akka of Bayan Ruwa	180
6	Aminu Jajani of Bayan Ruwa	120
7	Sani Ba ruwanka of Dagwarwa	135
8	Uban Kafirai of Dagwarwa	250
9	Mai bokolo of Dajin 'Yar Tunniya	300

	Bandit gang/leaders	No.
10	Haruna Zango of Dammaka	280
11	Muntari of Duddubi	31
12	Boyi of Duddudi	210
13	Turji of Fakai	500
14	Nakyalla of Filinga	213
15	Najana of Gidan Bisa	96
16	Sitanda of Gwari	156
17	Dullu of Sububu	138
18	Halilu Sububu of Sububu	1,200
19	Maiduna of Tankyalla	216
20	Gwaska of Tungar Kolo	76
21	Kabiru 'Yankusa of Safrar Kade	185
22	Karamin Gaye of Tungar Miya	242
23	'Dan Sa'adiya of Dagwarwa da Badako	48
24	'Dan Shehu of Kudo	140
25	Mati of Kudo	165
26	'Dan Bello of Kudo	98
	Dansadau Emirate	
27	'Dan Makaranta of north Madaka	460
28	Dogo Gyade at Dajin Babar Doka	2000
29	Damana in Dajin	1500
30	Ali Kacalla of Madada	1600
31	Malam at Western Cebi	900
32	Bulaki of east 'Yargaladima	1200
33	Ciyaman at East 'Yargaladima	900
34	Dahe in East 'Yar galadima	250
35	Kawu of eastern 'Dansadau	700
36	Ado Lalo of east 'Dansadau	350
37	Bulak of esst Cebi	520
38	Janburos of east Madada	800

	Bandit gang/leaders	No.
39	Sani Bica at east Madaka	180
40	Dan Bagobiri of Western Cebi	230
41	Nagala at West of Mairairai	750
42	Ali kanen Nagala at East Mairairai	220
43	Zahiru at between Gandaya and Mairairai	175
44	Mai Gariyo at Southern Burwaye	56
45	Yalo of near Burwaye	85
	Zurmi LGA	
46	Kachalla at North of Mayasa	1200
47	Maidaji at North of Labunde	1500
48	Dankarami at Tsanu	750
	Birnin Magaji LGA	
49	Alhaji Zaki of Rugu	85
50	Yalo of Rugu	60
51	Hassan of Rugu	28
52	Maidaji of Rugu	40
53	Kachalla of Rugu	58
	Shinkafi LGA	
54	Atarwatse of Dajin Mashema	200
55	Dan Makwado of Kamarawa and Bafarawa	550
56	Nagona at between Bafarawa and Surduku	200
	Tsafe LGA	
57	Idi at Guga	100
58	Baba Yayi at Guga	100
59	Juuli of Kwankwanba	100
60	Tukur of Munhaye	90
61	Alhaji Ado Aleru at Munhaye	2500
62	Mabi at Munhaye	100
63	Dan' Ibiro of Munhaye	100
64	Guntu at Munhaye	65

	Bandit gang/leaders	No.
65	Karki at Munhaye	70
66	Lawali Bunka at Munhaye	80
67	Shehu Bagewaye of Gusami	unspecified
68	Dancaki odita of Zurmi LGA	unspecified
69	Standard & Sani black in Bingil	unspecified

Source: Culled from Rufai .M.A (2021), I am a Bandit: A Decade of Research on Armed Banditry in Zamfara State, Text of 15th University Seminar Presented at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto Auditorium, Main Campus, 9th September, 2021.

As earlier noted, the phenomenon of banditry in North-west Nigeria has manifested in many violent, overlapping and interrelated forms. However, the most notable forms includes: farmers/herders conflict and cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, rape and gender based violence and raids on local communities.

Farmer–Herder Conflict/Cattle Rustling

Farmers/herders conflicts has existed in Nigeria for decades as a contest for ecological and environmental resources between pastoral Fulani cattle herders and the sedentary farmers. The conflicts have also, at various times, assumed religious and ethnic dimensions; particularly in north central part of the country where the Fulani pastoralist have been pitted against the indigenous farming communities. In recent years, the combination of environmental degradation in the far north, encroachment of grazing reserves and poor management by the government at both the federal and state levels, have resulted in a degeneration of the conflicts. This degeneration spawned the formation of many bandit groups and cattle rustling became one of their major goals. As aptly noted by Rufai (2021):

Historically, the first armed group evolved in 2011, led by Kundu and the notorious Buharin Daji both of Fulani background. They named the group “*kungiyar gayu*,” meaning an association of young guys, even though none of them was a youth...the group operated underground in the forests, but its real motive started to

manifest in 2012, when cases of cattle rustling began in Zamfara state. Members of the gang considered it as a cultural association aimed at the liberation of the Fulani from highhandedness of security agents, traditional rulers and politicians. The association was formed at a point when herders in the state were migrating to the neighboring states, due to large scale encroachment and confiscation of the grazing areas. Members of this association claimed that politicians and traditional rulers colluded in denying them access to the reserves.

Within October 2013 and March 2014, approximately 7,000 cattle were rustled from commercial livestock farms and traditional herders in Northwest Nigeria (Azeez and Yahya, 2016). Similarly, Aminu Bello Masari- the Governor of Katsina State, announced the recovery of 30,000 cattle from rustlers within a few months of setting up a joint military operation against the menace of cattle rustling (Tauna 2016). There are no reliable estimates of the total number of cattle that have been violently rustled by bandits within the last decade in Northern Nigeria as a whole. However, reports suggest that the figure could be in hundreds of thousands; as the phenomenon has become an organized racket with bandits and other criminal local and transnational collaborators calling the shots. Indeed, over the past decade, the perception that pastoral communities in the rural areas were subjected to all forms of extortion, exploitation and deprivation from different state agencies; sometimes in collusion with the sedentary local farmers played a major role in their alienation and mobilization for struggle against perceived injustice.

Kidnapping for Ransom/ Rape and Gender-Based Violence

Aside cattle rustling, kidnaping for ransom has also within the last decade become a major form of banditry in Nigeria. In 2014, Boko-Haram pioneered the practice of mass abductions of school children in the northeast when it kidnapped almost 300 school children from their dormitories. In recent years, the practice of mass abductions of

school children has also become common with bandits operating in the northwest region; confirming speculations that the bandits operating in the northwest have established links with, and are being significantly influenced by the Boko-haram insurgents. The practice of kidnapping for ransom is generally not peculiar to the Northern part of Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the practice began in the early 2000s in the oil rich Niger delta region where expatriates in the oil industry and other politically exposed persons were often targeted by militants. However, the sudden uptick in fatalities per attempt, coincides with the increase in attacks by bandits on villages especially in Zamfara and Katsina states, a situation which has gradually extended to Kaduna and Niger states. In December 2019, more than 300 boys were kidnaped in a boarding school in Kankara, Katsina state while the President was visiting the region. Between March 2020 and June 2021, over 1,400 students and staff were also kidnapped in several school abductions reported across North-west Nigeria. These abductions took place in Kankara and Mahuta (Katsina state), Kagara and Teginia (Niger state), Jangebe and Maradun (Zamfara state), Mando, Afaka, and Kasarami (Kaduna state), and Birnin Yauri (Kebbi state).

Apart from the mass abductions and kidnap of school children, the practice has also become common along some major highways across the country. The Kaduna-Abuja highway, Zaria-Gusau road and Kaduna-Kachia roads to mention but a few have become notorious for being a kidnapers den controlled by bandits. In all of these abductions and kidnaps which continues on almost daily basis, the fundamental motives have been to generate funds through ransom payments. In a report by an intelligence outfit, it was noted that between 2011 and 2020, Nigerians paid at least \$18.34 million (N7 billion) as ransom to kidnapers (Kabir 2020). Some state Governors have also regularly been alleged to have paid ransoms to bandits; even though they rarely admit to doing so (Kabir 2020). Unlike with cattle rustling where the victims are a specific group of cattle owners; and where the bandits have to deal with the ponderous process of disposing stolen herds in black markets, mass abductions and kidnap for ransom has emerged as a “democratisation of the security crisis” in

the northwest; with anyone within the northwest being a potential target. Indeed, the phenomenon of mass abductions and kidnap by bandits has proven to be a much more convenient and lucrative criminal enterprise which also enhances the notoriety of the bandits.

Closely associated with the spate of mass kidnap and abductions has been the perpetuation of rape and gender related violence against the victims of the bandits. As Rufai vividly notes:

Some gangs around Dansadau, Magamin Maitarko and Dangulbi areas of Zamfara state organized attacks and village raids to satisfy sexual urge. This is mostly done by gangs with few members with specific target of their victims. The aim of this attack is mainly for the rape of young teenage girls. An interaction with a member of such gang, demonstrates that some pseudo marabouts often ask them to rape virgin girls if they want a certain charm to work. The option is either to rape them at the scene or kidnap for rape (Rufai 2021).

Raids on Markets/Local Communities

Bandits operating in Nigeria's North-west are also known to engage in raids on markets and local communities. In most of these raids which occurs mostly at nights, the gangs storm villages and markets in their hundreds on motorcycles to rustle cattle, kidnap victims for ransom or sexual purposes. Bandits have also raided communities in order to "deal with" recalcitrant and uncooperative communities for daring to resist their acts of criminality, or for cooperating with state agencies in counteractive measures. Table 2 presents some of the major bandit leaders in the North-west, their location and the nature of their criminal activities.

Table 2: Major bandit leaders in the Northwest and their areas of operations

	Bandit groups	Location	Crime
1	Abubakar Abdallah (alias Dogo Gide)	Kaduna and Niger States	Kidnapping, cattle rustling armed robbery Gender-Based and Sexual Violence (GBSV). The group was responsible for the kidnapping of 102 staff and students of Federal Govt. Girls College, Yauri on Jun 18, 2021.
2	Yellow Jan-Bros	Birnin Gwari Forest and Giwa Areas of Kaduna State	Kidnapping, cattle rustling, GBSV and village raiding. The group was responsible for the kidnapping of 136 Islamiyya Students in Tagina village, Rafi LGA, Niger State on May 30, 2021.
3	Tsoho Manjagara	Giwa Local Government, Kaduna State.	Kidnapping, cattle rustling, GBSV
4	Alhaji Bodere and Ahaji Beleri	Sabon Birni, Giwa LGA, Kaduna State	Kidnapping, GBSV armed robbery and forced labour and willful destruction of crops.
5	Yellow Ashana	Sabon Garin Gyadam, Kaduna State	Kidnapping and GBSV.
6	Ali Kawaje also called Ali Kachalla	Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State and Kagara LGA, Niger State	Forced displacement of communities or grazing reserves, mass killing, Kidnapping and GBSV.
7	Alhaji Isiya, Buhari General and Gannaie	Kaduna-Abuja Highway, Kaduna State	Killing, kidnapping, rape, Forced marriage and GBSV and forceful collection of farming and grazing levies from the communities
8	Alhaji Ado Aleru	Yan-Kuzo in Chafe LGA as well as some parts of Kastina and Zamfara states	Killing, Kidnapping, GBSV, forced labour, negotiation with state officials in the payment of ransom as well as 'buying' of kidnapped persons from other kidnappers.
9	Lanke, Umar Bengo, Yahaya, Kabir	Dan Rumfa village in Jibya LGA	Kidnapping, killing, arms smuggling and armed robbery

	Bandit groups	Location	Crime
10	Auwalun Daudawa	Safana, Dan-Musa and Batsari LGAs, Katsina State.	Cattle rustling, rape, kidnapping, attacks on villages and vigilante members.
11	Dangotte Bazamfare	Along Katsina and Zamfara borders	Killing of innocent citizens, kidnapping, GBSV, attack on villages, police and military outpost as well as child labour
12	Alhaji Auta, Ardo NaShaware, Ardo Nashama and Alhaji Shingi	Birnin Magaji LGA, Zamfara State	Cattle rustling, forced labour, attack on rival bandits camps
13	Dankarami	Zurmi LGA, Zamfara State	Attack on police and military outposts, kidnapping, rape, forced labour and armed robbery. He is widely known for his anti-security agencies sentiment
14	Alhaji Shehu Rekep and Alhaji Halilu	Tsafe, Maru and Anka LGAs, Zamfara State	Kidnapping, GBSV, supply of arms and ammunitions to the armed groups responsible for the recruitment and training of foot soldiers to other groups.
15	Manu D. O	Birnin Gwari and Giwa Areas, Kaduna state	Cattle Rustling and kidnapping
16	Saleh piya-piya	Anchau, Kaduna State	Armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling.

Source: Culled from Rufai, M.A (2021), I am a bandit: a decade of research on armed banditry in Zamfara State, Text of 15th University Seminar Presented at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto Auditorium, Main Campus, Sept. 9, 2021

The Causes and Nigerian Governments Responses to Banditry in the Northwestern Region

Further to the deplorable socioeconomic conditions of the northwestern region, banditry in the Northwest generally conflates two underlying problems. First, is the crisis of the vast “ungoverned spaces”. Northern

Nigeria as a whole covers about 60% of Nigeria's land area and hosts a large expanse of forest lands which have been designated as official forest reserves. However, due to several decades of neglect and poor management these forests have been colonized and made "ungovernable" by bandits. Second, the increasing "delegitimization of the state" occasioned by deteriorating socio-economic conditions and the disconnect between the political elite and state agencies on one hand, and the rural populace on the other, have also been a major factor in the emergence and increase of banditry in Nigeria. A boom in the trade in small arms and light weapons in the northwest occasioned by a number of factors including; the porosity of Nigeria's borders which has led to the influx of these weapons from crisis ridden countries such as Libya and Mali has also encouraged the growth of banditry within the northwest region. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the northwest was vividly captured by Rufai (2001) when he noted that "there were more weapons than cattle in Zamfara". A retired bandit corroborated this in an interview by noting that:

owning a gun was much better to a Fulani youth in Zamfara state than having cattle. By being armed you had power, prestige and much more resources than you could have gotten by just owning cattle (interview with a former Bandit).

The presence of large mineral deposits such as gold in Zamfara and Katsina state has also spawned a lucrative illegal mining enterprise which has also been an incentive for banditry. Indeed, the attempt to be dominant in the scramble for the exploitation of these mineral resources has resulted in the emergence of bandit gangs sometimes with political and international collaborators who fight over control of the mining fields. As Ogbonnaya (2020) notes

Although Nigeria's artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector has considerable developmental potential, it is undermined by the criminal consortia profiteering from it at the expense of vulnerable populations. In Nigeria's North West region, criminal collaboration in the illegal mining of gold between 'Nigerians in high positions of

authority' and foreign corporations deprives the state of legitimate earnings. It also drives rural banditry and violent local conflicts.

Suffice it to say that the causes of banditry in the northwest are complex and multifaced. These causes derive from a degeneration in the socio-economic and political conditions and relations within the northwestern region. Indeed, decades of neglect and poor governance resulting in increasing poverty, alienation of the rural populace, desertification, poor regulatory policies and border patrols have combined in a combustible cocktail of violence and lawlessness within the northwestern region.

Despite the problems posed by the phenomenon of banditry, the Nigerian government had been lethargic in handling the crisis since 2011 until it festered out of control. Indeed, until recently, the attempt to address the phenomenon across the entire northwestern region has been uncoordinated, with the state governments of the region adopting a different position on the crisis. While the government of Kaduna state has for instance been consistent in advocating the use of force against the bandits, some states such as Katsina and Zamfara state at a point arranged for negotiations and a short-lived peace deal through an amnesty programme for the bandits. In 2016, the federal government launched a military operation against the bandits codenamed operation *Harbin Kunama* (scorpion's sting). The military operation produced brief periods of calm as bandits were forced to relocate, but the bandits quickly regrouped and continued their onslaught and criminality. Apart from deploying ground troops and Air Force (NAF) to tackle banditry in the northwest, the states within the region and Nasarawa state have recruited 3,000 special vigilantes to complement the efforts of the military. Other measures taken jointly by the states in the region to cripple the activities of bandits, included the shutting down of mobile telecommunication networks to cut off informants of bandits and kidnappers. The movement of cattle and food was also banned in the local governments worst hit by the crisis, while some local weekly markets were shutdown to cut off supplies to bandits who are held up in forests. The sale of petrol to motor

cycles and also in jerrycans was also prohibited in order to disrupt the logistics and mobility of the bandits. Thus, the response of the Nigerian state on the activities of bandits has essentially been reactionary with the underlying socio-economic and political factors fueling the crisis remaining unresolved. Perhaps, the most remarkable development in the campaign against banditry within the northwestern region is the official declaration of the bandits as terrorist. For about a year civil society organisations, and Nigeria's National Assembly had recommended that the Nigerian government declare the bandits as terrorist in order to provide the legal backing for a sustained campaign and onslaught against the bandits but the government failed to do so until November 2021 when it officially signed the gazette pronouncing such declaration. By this declaration, the legal provisions governing anti-terrorism campaigns are expected to apply in the campaign against banditry.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation

Banditry historically has always been the fallout of socio-economic and political factors. The state is therefore complicit; directly or indirectly in the construction and interpretation of banditry. As it obtains in Nigeria, banditry has been a complex mix of violent confrontations and attacks 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. The phenomenon has thrived within the context of increasing poverty, deteriorating socio-economic conditions and depleted options for livelihood. The poor management of grievances between pastoralist and sedentary farmers by government has also been a critical factor in the spread of banditry in the northwestern region of Nigeria. The porosity of the Nigerian borders which has resulted in the influx of small arms and light weapons have also played a major role in the development of the phenomenon of banditry in Northwest Nigeria.

In the light of the destructive tendencies of banditry, the consequences have been dire: kidnapping by bandits have ensured that an increasing

number of school children have been thrown out of school, socio-economic activities have been disrupted and farming in the rural areas is increasingly becoming a challenge, thereby posing a threat to national food security. Yet, in spite of the threats posed by banditry, the efforts against the phenomenon is still largely reactionary as no deliberate proactive effort towards addressing the issues underlying the phenomenon are in place. It is on the basis of this reality that the following recommendations are made.

1. Government has to be more responsive to its citizenry especially through the introduction of populist policies targeted at improving the welfare of the citizens.
2. The institution of a system of social justice based on the principles of equality and transparency is crucial towards addressing the grievances of aggrieved groups.
3. A deliberate effort towards reducing the level of poverty in the northwest must be put in place. This is particularly necessary to serve as a disincentive for the recruitment of the youths into banditry.
4. Increase collaboration with Nigeria's neighboring countries is necessary particularly in the areas of border patrol to check against the smuggling of small arms and light weapons. The adoption of artificial intelligence for surveillance of the borders is also very crucial in this regard.

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