

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BANDITRY ON NIGERIA'S ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper examined the socio-economic implications of armed bandits in the North-west and north-central Nigeria. The North-west and north-central have been at the receiving end since Boko Haram reared its ugly head. Now there is the problem of other groups like Fulani herdsmen and now armed bandits and the north is no longer safe. The insurgency is spreading not only in the northwest and north-central but also has spread all over the country. This Security challenges need to be tackled to create an enabling environment for the socio-economic development of that region as well as the country at large. The armed bandits are generally known as "Kwanta-Kwanta". The paper highlights that violence is increasing against a backdrop of poor governance and deteriorating socio-economic conditions in northern Nigeria, further exacerbating instability across the region. For some time now, Nigeria had kept on seeing an enormous misfortune in its financial improvement fuelled by the nonstop resurgence of various types of safety dangers especially outfitted banditry, capturing, uprising, pastoralists/rancher struggle, among others consequently representing a genuine danger to the country's public safety. These acts of banditry result in injury, loss of human lives, loss of property and a sustained fear of victimization among the border communities. The paper looked at the government responses to insecurity and found out that things are not going well in terms of counter-terrorism.

Keywords: Terrorism, Bandit, Insurgency, Insecurity, Socio-Economic Deprivation.

1.1 Background to the Study

For some time now, Nigeria has been a hotbed of conflicts. Apart from the perennial conflict between the farmers and herdsmen, there are other notable security challenges, which includes the activities of the Biafra separatists, militant Islamists in the North-East, kidnappings in many parts of the country, the Niger Delta imbroglio, and so on. However, the Boko Haram group remains arguably Nigeria's biggest security threat. The United Nations had claimed that the number of deaths was far more than reported (The Punch, 2020).

The flow of illicit firearms in communities of the North West region is also a cause for security concern. Apart from fatalities recorded, bandits' attacks on communities increased social risks, discouraged investment and triggered an economic crisis for individuals and communities. The conflict is causing a spillover effect on other neighbouring communities and local government areas of Niger State in the North-Central region, hindering inter-communal and inter-state trade.

Banditry violence is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The history of banditry in Nigeria can be traced to pre-civil war period when government deteriorated in certain parts of the old Western region resulting in political violence, crime and organised insurgency (Odinkalu, 2018). Accordingly to Nadama (2019), during the civilian reign, local bandits were reportedly stealing domestic animals. Recently, in the Northwest area of Nigeria particularly in Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Niger, Kaduna and Kebbi States, the activities of Bandits have been particularly worrisome. The activities of these bandits' ranges from kidnapping to murder, robbery, rape, cattle-rustling, and the likes. Their modus operandi involves maiming and killing their victims when they least expect. Usually, they mobilized themselves through the forests into the neighborhood riding on fast motorcycles especially in the nights and shoot at will. Sometimes in the afternoon, once they were sure there were no security presence of the police or military around, they unleash terror in the communities. This growing threat is claiming victims in hundreds. Several children have been orphaned and women became widows overnight while the issue of food security as well as humanitarian tragedy will further make life unbearable for many Nigerians.

The facts are scary. While about "1,100 people were murdered in 2018 in the six states of North west Nigeria in 2018, over 2,200 were killed in 2019 and 1,600 killed between January and June 2020". About 247,000 people had been displaced while their activities alone have led to the production of more than 41,000 refugees. In Zamfara alone, over 8000 people have been murdered in the last decade, 200,000 displaced internally and others fleeing to neighbouring states (International Crisis Group Report, 2020). According to Ezigbo (2020), the situation is so porous already that the religious leader and Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa ad Abubakar opined that "Bandits now move in the North from house to house with AK47 and lamented that the region had become the worst place to live in Nigeria" In Sokoto, more than 250 people have been killed in about 20 attacks (Mohammed, 2020), just to mention but few.

It is important to note that the newest Northwest conflict started because of fight over depleting lands and water resources between the farmers and the herdsmen with the farmers belonging mostly to the Hausa people and the herdsmen being predominantly Fulani (International Crisis Group Report, 2020). As a consequence, there has been massive deforestation because of the impact of the Sahara Desert spreading south (Orjiinmo, 2020).

Armed banditry in the north-western states of Zamfara, Kaduna and Katsina has reached alarming heights in recent years. Bandits terrorise 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. The discovery of gold mines and the activities of illegal miners competing for the control of gold reserves have served to further intensify the existence and activities of armed groups in the northwest. By March 2020, more than 210,000 people have been internally displaced. Kidnapping by these armed bandits is no longer only in northern Nigeria but has spread all over the country.

In recent times, banditry has become a harsh reality in today's Nigeria society; it has come in different forms of manifesting as insurgency's, kidnapping, suicide attacks, self-suicide bombing, corruption, armed robbery and the like. (Enders & Sandler 2002; Lake, 2000). Several attempts have been made to reduce the inflicts of this menace in the Nigerian society (Luechinger, 2013); the Nigeria government has tried using a counter-insurgent force as policy deterrence, with the imposition of sanctions, to curb

actual attempts by putting appropriate measures in place to reduce the menaces of banditry in the country.

Banditry and other causes of insecurity in northern Nigeria have been allowed to degenerate into a complex national emergency with dire territorial implications. This mirrors exactly what happened with the Boko Haram insurgency. From sporadic incidents, Boko Haram began launching systematic attacks targeted at individuals, communities and, eventually, the state.

It is therefore expedient to examine the dynamics of this recent surge in armed banditry, the challenges inhibiting the fight against banditry and how to prevent the total shutdown of the country by bandits and insurgents alike. But first, who are these bandits?

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Democratic Peace Theory to explain the Security challenges in Nigerian. According to this theory, security largely depends on encouraging liberal institutions to discharge their responsibilities creditably; and a security policy must have as its long-term the spread of liberalism (Doyle, 1998). Therefore, the route to peace is to encourage a democratic system, universal respect for human rights and the development of civil society. But such a conclusion depends largely on the untroubled and robust correlation between the democratic nature of a state and peaceful inclination. Thus, the democratic peace theory assumes that liberal states do not fight wars against other liberal states. This theory was first enunciated in a keynote article by Michael Doyle in the Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (Doyle, 1998). Thus, Doyle argued that there was a difference between liberal practice towards liberal societies and liberal practice towards non-liberal societies. Unemployment has a severe negative implication on national development in Nigeria as most of its productive force is unemployed. What this means theoretically is that socio economic deprivation and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given cause at token benefit Salawu (2010). It could predispose one to engaging in illicit activities that would undermine security of the environment.

From security point of view, the recommendations of democratic peace theory are clear. According to this theory, security largely depends on encouraging liberal institutions to discharge their responsibilities creditably; and a security policy must have as its long-term the spread of liberalism (Doyle, 1998). Therefore, the route to peace is to encourage democratic system, the universal respect for human rights and the development of civil society. But such conclusion depends largely on untroubled and robust correlation between the democratic nature of state and peaceful inclination. By application of this theory to security challenges and economy of the Nigerian state, we argue that for Nigeria to address her perennial security challenges, the need to adopt and faithfully implement strategic security policies and viable socio economic programmes capable of strengthening the growth of democracy in Nigeria are the first step to be adopted by government. Thus, we further argue that the increasing spate of security threats in Nigeria which if unchecked could further distort the country's economy is clearly symptomatic of the abysmal failure of the institutions constitutionally charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives and properties of Nigerian citizens (Dinneya, 2006).

2.2 The Concept of Banditry

Banditry is a type of organized crime committed by outlaws typically involving the threat or use of violence. A person who engages in banditry is known as a bandit and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either as an individual or in groups. Banditry means different things to different people.

The concept of banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. A bandit in 19th century Europe and the Americas was a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from the upper class or colonised over the colonizer (Warto, 1994). Therefore, Mexicans have warm regards and respect for those “social workers” termed bandits, while on the contrary, the State often considered them as nuisance and outlaws that need to be eradicated (Watts, 1987).

Therefore, in some pre-industrial societies, peasants see bandits differently from the State not as outlaws, hoodlums and miscreants but as avengers and breadwinners. However, a bandit in a traditional African setting is opposite to that of America and Europe. The former specialised in armed robbery and other related crimes (Curott & Fink, 2008). The most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming, killing and wanton destruction of property, hence, it has a direct relationship with cattle rustling (Rufai, 2018). Since most herdsmen could do anything possible to prevent the rustling of their herds, then the bandit also applies force with the aid of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) to affect the stealing of livestock (Addo, 2006).

The modern transformation of banditry could be understood against the backdrop of the prevailing security dialectics in Nigeria. Accordingly, gangs of criminals, often youth from farming and herding communities and/or local bandits, take advantage of the growing insecurity, fear and cyclical attacks to loot villages, engage in highway robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain. Both farming and herding communities often suffer from this criminality (Bagu & Smith, 2017; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

2.3 Socio-economic implications of Banditry in Northern Nigeria

Socio-economic development, therefore, is the process of social and economic development in a society. It is measured with indicators, such as gross domestic product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment.

The flow of illicit firearms in communities of the North-West region is also a cause for security concern. Apart from fatalities recorded, bandits' attacks on communities increased social risks, discouraged investment and triggered an economic crisis for individuals and communities. The conflict is causing a spillover effect on other neighbouring communities and local government areas of Niger State in the North-Central region, hindering inter-communal and inter-state trade.

After fifty-three years of nationhood, Nigeria still ranks among the poorest countries in the world, also ranks low in all socio-economic indicators such as life expectancy, death rate, access to water, poverty rate, mortality rate, and crime rate, and still carries the tag of a developing economy. Nigeria is a classic illustration of an oxymoron, a poor country amid abundant human and natural resources. This scenario has contributed to security challenges that have bedevilled the country since independence till now with grave consequences for socio-economic development. No nation can achieve socio-economic development in an environment of socio and physical insecurity. The increasing challenge of insecurity

in Nigeria has also been linked to the failure of leadership to deliver good governance, and secure the welfare of persons on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice. The ruling elites in Nigeria in both the military and democratic dispensation are dependent, parasitic, and very corrupt, and mal-administration (Ali, 2013).

The inability of the government to provide a secure and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of business and economic activities has led to resentment and disaffection among ethnic groups. This has resulted in ethnic violence, communal clashes, and religious violence in different parts of the country that has destroyed lives and properties disrupted businesses and economic activities, and retarded the economic growth and development of Nigeria. There is no investor whether local or foreign that will be motivated to invest in an unsafe and insecure environment. In a globalized world, investors are not only looking for high returns on their investments but also a safe haven for their investments. Thus, the alarming level of insecurity in Nigeria has made the economy unattractive to foreign investors, and this has impacted negatively on economic growth and development. It is not only foreign investors that are running away from investing in the Northern states but also people from southern Nigeria.

The government's inability to effectively and efficiently protect life and property is taking a toll on the cost of doing business in the country as well as on the disposable incomes of many Nigerians, pushing such costs to almost ten per cent, according to estimates and findings by The Guardian. Available data on the economic impact of violence on countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) according to the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) in its 2021 report on the economic value of peace, showed that as much as eight per cent of Nigeria's GDP or \$132.59 billion (N50.38 trillion at N380/\$1) is being impacted economically by growing violence around the country (<https://guardian.ng/news/nigerians-pay-more-for-insecurity-as-economic-impact-hits-n50tr/>).

All the participants in the discussion (100%) observed that banditry has brought negative impacts on food security in Katsina state. This is because banditry characterized by killings, kidnappings, threats, robberies, theft, burnings, raiding and blocking of local trade routes which are highlighted below: All the participants in the discussion (100%) observed that banditry has brought negative impacts on food security in Katsina state. This is because banditry characterized by killings, kidnappings, threats, robberies, theft, burnings, raiding and blocking of local trade routes which are highlighted below:

The Nigerian economy is going down by the day due to the activities of Bandits, Boko Haram, Fulani-Herdsmen and Militancy in the Niger Delta. Agricultural products are on the decline, no country invests in Nigeria and importation are on the decline also because businessmen and women are not sure the way the country is careering to. There is insecurity everywhere and people are afraid to even move about in this country.

2.4 Armed banditry and national security

A murderous reign of terror by bandits and sundry criminals is crippling Nigeria. Instead of abating as the citizens expected, bandits are mercilessly spreading their nefarious tentacles to hitherto safe communities around the country. In the past two weeks, the killers have stamped their bloody imprint on Osun, Anambra, Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, Benue and Niger states. Disturbingly, the regime of

the President, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), seems to have lost control of the state to criminals (<https://punchng.com/nigeria-failing-under-crippling-effects-of-banditry/>).

In 2011 northwest Nigeria experienced a surge in bandit attacks between the nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary Hausa farming communities. [Environmental and ecological changes caused](#) land and water to become valuable commodities, sparking fierce, and often violent, competition over resources. Over the past decade banditry has evolved from a communal rivalry into lethal militia groups. Banditry has become an appealing method of income in northwest Nigeria where [weak governance, youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality](#) have left people with depleted options for livelihood. [Security services](#) are often understaffed and lack the proper resources to effectively combat banditry. Vast areas of [unregulated forests](#) allow for easy concealment, and police and military forces have difficulty penetrating the rough terrain. In addition, under-policed borders have aided the proliferation of small arms and light weapons amongst bandit groups.

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 rural banditry.

Living in Buhari's Nigeria is nightmarish. Most of the 23 different indicators, including political terror, deaths from internal conflict, and murder rate, used by the Global Peace Index 2021 to measure how dangerous or safe a country is, are afflicting Nigeria. Out of 163 countries, Nigeria is placed 16th in the group of 20 with war-ravaged countries like Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Iraq and Somalia. Our analysis of the GPI data suggests that Nigeria again occupies the seventh position among the most dangerous countries for women.

These days, nowhere or nobody is safe anymore. In Wasinmi, a rural Osun community, gunmen audaciously wiped out a family of six in mid-March. The massacre is a vivid reminder of the rapid descent into lawlessness in the country. That same period, gunmen attacked a commercial vehicle between Ikere-Ekiti in Ekiti State and Iju, a border town with Ondo State, killing a passenger. At the weekend, gunmen kidnapped Kolawole Omotayo, a community leader in Imope-Ijebu, Ijebu North Local Government Area. In another clime, these violent incidents would have instigated emergency actions by the government (<https://punchng.com/nigeria-failing-under-crippling-effects-of-banditry/>).

Security is presently a major challenge in Nigeria, especially in Northern part of the country, even though the government claims to be on top of the situation, the problem persists. Thus, National security, a concept understood by some as an abstract notion relating to the 'condition of the state', and referred to in security and intelligence legislation. It argues that the concept of national security can serve a more vital role, as a principle for organizing government. Ammerdown (2016) asserts that national and international security may be understood as a shared freedom from fear and want, and the freedom to live in dignity. It implies social and ecological health rather than the absence of risk as a common right. [Prabhakaran](#) (2008) argues that national security is the measurable state of the 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 state policy through governance and is extendable to global security by variables external to it.

The impacts of banditry on local populations have been devastating. According to a 2019 [report by the Zamfara State government](#), between 2011 and 2019, bandits killed at least 6,319 people, kidnapped 3,672 people and burnt more than 500 villages in Zamfara State alone. The activities of bandits have also displaced more than 200,000 people while more than [35,000 Nigerians](#) have been forced to emigrate to the Niger Republic due to the destruction of their communities by [bandits](#). Bandits have [reportedly](#) killed more Nigerians than Boko Haram, robbers, kidnappers and cultists combined, and [were reportedly responsible](#) for 47.5 per cent of all violent deaths in 2019.

Due to the intensity of their attacks on communities and citizens, [policymakers](#), security agencies, [media agencies](#) and citizens have called for these groups to be classified as terrorists rather than as bandits. To demonstrate the urgency of the security situation in the North West, media outlets often use the terms 'bandits' and 'terrorists' interchangeably to describe the criminal gangs, which have been accused by communities of being responsible for murders, ransom-driven kidnappings, sexual violence and other violent crimes.

For now, no one is sure whether it is the Nigerian state or bandits who are in power in the North-West. Since December, bandits have turned to raid schools. In Katsina State, bandits kidnapped over 300 pupils in Kankara; about 279, aged 10 to 17 in Jangebe, Zamfara State; 39 at the Federal Forestry College, Kaduna and 27 pupils and teachers in Kagara, Niger State. Bandits murdered Abba Haki, an aide of a former Sokoto State governor, Aliyu Wamakko, two days after his abduction in Durbaɓwa, Kware LGA. In most of northern Nigeria, farmers have become endangered because bandits have taken over vast swathes of the territory. Airstrikes by the Nigeria Air Force have done little to stem the tide.

Few days ago, the Chief Imam of Apo Legislative Quarters Mosque, Sheikh Nuru Khalid, revealed that bandits now control part of Nigeria, and he heaped the blame for bandits growing control on President Muhammadu Buhari, saying he has failed the country. Bandits attacks according to the Imam worsened since the criminal gangs emerged under Buhari's regime. Most of them are based in vast forests across Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, and Zamfara states. These was said by the Imam in Abuja during the presentation of the book, "The Infinite Light, the Pride of Humanity written by Sheikh Fathullah Gulen.

3.1 Conclusion

I have been able to look at the causes of insurgencies and what people think about the insecurity within this entity called Nigeria. In spite of the fact that not all of these security challenges are defiant and hostile to the socio-economic improvement of the nation but their exercises in one way or the other have debilitated national cohesion and belief and empowered ethnic awareness among the different tribes and ethnic nationalities within the nation over a long time. Of all these security challenges, Boko Haram, banditry and Fulani herders have made the foremost challenging circumstances within the nation driving to all frames of counter-insurgency measures and a few of which have to weaken human rights.

From all indications, the actual causes of terrorism in northern Nigeria are nothing but poverty, illiteracy, small arms proliferation and porosity of our borders in northern Nigeria. The elites subjected the masses in northern Nigeria to abject poverty by making them live the life of begging for alms without

exposing them to western education like children and youths in the south. This is the major cause of insecurity in the north. These children that have been begging all their lives grew into adulthood without any good means of livelihood and they end up joining bad gangs because man must survive. Until the issue of mass begging is stopped there will be no end to terrorism in that region.

The Nigerian government has complained about not having adequate modern equipment to give to her security personnel to work and had appealed to the international community to help in this regard. Fighting terrorism or banditry is not a tea party. Government must be proactive and partner with affected communities to bring a lasting solution to it. How do these bandits' source for guns and tools to fight with? Where are they hiding? How do they access finance? Do they have records that can be accessed? Is it possible to trace their roots and linkage? How can information leakage among security personnel's or civilians partnering with them be reduced? Answers to these questions will show that the threats of bandits can be reduced if not nullified. The government is being economical with the truth. Some of the politicians are the sponsors of these bandits. The Nigerian government can stop terrorism in the country if she wants, but still playing politics with it. There is no day that passes that innocent people are not killed or kidnapped in the North and the federal government are taken all these for granted.

The idea of the government paying these terrorist ransoms for kidnapping is not helping matters. It is encouraging them to continue in the act of insurgency. Our government responses to terrorism are wrong, to say the least. Imagine after paying the sum of N55m and still demanding N3m worth of motorbikes before they can release the remaining hostages. The more the government is paying them for such crime the more they are buying sophisticated weapons for the stock in trade. The major problems we have in this country towards checking the menace of terrorism is the responses from the Federal government.

3.2 Recommendations

Right and wrong steps of counter-terrorism by Nigerian government, where negotiations with bandits or criminals is a temporary solution and unrealistic measures of a kind, rather the authority should find a way to educate the illiterate, employ the unemployed and alleviate poverty to make crime unjustifiable, thus the following could be examined:

1. Our northern borders are nothing to write home about; there are poorly managed to say the least. Small arms and other weapons are crossed over the borders on daily basis without proper checks by the security operatives. Some of these security personnel are bribed with money and these arms are allowed to be brought into the country.
2. Arising from the strategic neglect of border communities in terms of socio-economic development, the border communities also provided sites for the development of poorly managed forest reserves which provided cover and hideouts for the armed bandits. Therefore, government should address the issues of unemployment, poverty, neglect of the border communities and social injustice with a view to improving the socio-economic conditions of the residents and, also reducing the tendency to turn to crime as an alternative to survival.

3. *The Nigerian government has complained about not having adequate modern equipment to give to her security personnel to work and had appealed to the international community to help in this regard. Fighting terrorism or banditry is not a tea party. Government must be proactive and partner with affected communities to bring a lasting solution to it. How do these bandits' source guns and tools to fight with? Where are they hiding? How do they access to finance? Do they have records that can be accessed? Is it possible to trace their roots and linkage? How can information leakage among security personnel's or civilians partnering with them be reduced? Answers to these questions will show that the threats of bandits can be reduced if not nullified. All the things mentioned above are known. Terrorists in Nigeria are been sponsored by politicians, and elites in the North. The Federal government and some northern States governors cannot tell us that they do not know these people.*
4. The Federal Government, as a matter of necessity and urgency should tackle the issues of *Boko Haram* insurgency, rural banditry, militancy and ethnic militia that are found in most parts of the country. These are the sources of violence, conflicts, mercenary inflows, gun-running, etc. which aggravates insecurity and lawlessness in the land.
5. The government should develop strategies and programmes to disarm bandits of their dangerous weapons. It was observed that bandit uses AK 47 to unleash terror attacks on their victim and with other dangerous weapons. It is not only that, the federal government of Nigeria has not agreed that *Boko Haram*, Armed Bandits and Fulani-Herdsmen are terrorist organisations and has been treating them with kid-gloves. Tell me why these groups have not been proscribed, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is proscribed. The government should be very serious with her counter-terrorism programme.
6. The task of crime prevention and control is not that of the security agents alone as all hands must be on desk so as to achieve effective peace and order. Thus, a comprehensive security strategy that greatly involves the community must be urgently put in place so as to effectively tackle armed robbery and other sundry crimes militating national security and development.

Civil-military cooperation is a necessity and infrastructural development is a must even to rural dwellers as well as access to communication, police presence and protection. Not only these, the vigilantes that have been formed in the various communities in the north to combat the activities of these bandits must also be professionally trained and well organised by the government to work better and aid their communities. The movement of small arms and light ammunitions through the porous borders must be checked in cooperation with other countries in the region but ultimately, poverty must be drastically reduced, and providing good education to all citizens must become the priority of the government.

Finally, effective mechanisms must be implemented to mitigate the threat of banditry in Nigeria's northwest. A peacebuilding process that includes dialogue between security agencies and communities will be crucial to establishing effective policing, early warning, and intelligence gathering. The federal government must increase funding for police and security forces to effectively oversee rural areas, control cross-border arms proliferation, and

strengthen intelligence capabilities. In addition, addressing the root problems that often drive people to violence — inequality, poverty, lack of education and job opportunities — is needed to stem the recruitment of youth into bandit groups.

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