

Unveiling the Roots and Ripple Effects of Banditry in Katsina State: A Deep Dive into Causes and Consequences

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Abstract

This study explores the underlying causes and far-reaching effects of banditry in Katsina state, with a particular focus on the perspectives of local communities through qualitative methodologies. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving community members, stakeholders, and security personnel in Danmusa, Kankara, Batsari and Jibia Local government areas, this research aims at understanding the factors driving banditry and its social, economic, and psychological impacts. The qualitative approach enable the collection of rich, descriptive data, revealing the complexity of the issues beyond what factors contribute to the rise of banditry in Katsina state. Drug abuse emerged as a major catalyst that triggers criminal activities. Bad governance seemed a fertile reason for bandit groups to thrive. Furthermore, inter-tribal mistrust rooted in the longstanding farmers-herders conflict has exacerbated tensions, particularly between the Fulani nomadic herders and Hausa sedentary farmers. This mistrust, often ignited by competition over land and water resources, has led to communal strife, further destabilizing the region. The consequences of banditry are profound including kidnapping and displacement of communities to the disruption of agricultural activities, which form the backbone of local economy. The study also found significant psychological impacts, with many residents living in a constant state of fear and insecurity. Addressing the root causes requires a comprehensive approach, including strengthening governance, promoting dialogue between communities, and providing youth-oriented programs to curb drug abuse. This research highlights the need for policymakers and stakeholders to address the multi-faceted drivers of banditry to ensure sustainable peace and development in Katsina state.

Keywords: Drug-abuse, Banditry, Agriculture, Social relation.

Introduction

While banditry has sporadically punctuated Nigeria's history, the contemporary wave of banditry in the North West of the country has reached the level of a full-blown security crisis. Despite having received limited attention compared to the insurgency in the country's North East, (CDC, 2022). Banditry violence in recent years has outweighed the violence perpetrated by groups like Boko Haram (ICR, 2021). Banditry today has come to be associated with its most common manifestations including "kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources (Brener, 2021). Typically, these acts are perpetrated by a loose collection of rural armed criminal groups. The explanations of the origins and motivations behind the contemporary semi-structured wave of violence differ, with analyses alternatively placing emphasis on rural organized crime, conflict over land use between farmers

and herders, and violence between Fulani and Hausa, amongst other causes all exacerbated by climate change and the lack of employment.

Owing to the escalating number of and violence associated with bandit attacks, banditry has become a significant political focus in recent years. The violence spiraled so high that, in 2022, the Nigerian government designated individuals engaging in select bandit groups as “terrorists (Osasona, 2023). According to ACLED data (2023), bandit attacks on communities in the North West rose by 731 per cent between 2018 and 2022. There are concerns that insurgent groups in Niger and bandit groups in the North West could start cooperating or even merge, potentially creating a “land bridge” between jihadists in the North East of Nigeria and those operating in Niger, a development that many fears could destabilize an already fragile region entirely (Kleffmann, 2023). Banditry is the North West’s greatest security challenge today, but despite the effects of banditry being widely felt across the region, there is still confusion as to what banditry is, and questions about what can be done to address it.

This report seeks to address this gap. Provided the manifold dimensions and fault lines the banditry phenomenon has been associated with in previous scholarly work and public discourse (Hausa/Fulani, farmer-herder conflicts, climate, socio-economic and land use issues), this report seeks to provide insights on banditry through the lens of those most affected by it. It interrogates survey data on personal victimization experiences as well as perceptions of bandit groups and the dynamics underlying bandit violence. These insights seek to contribute to a sounder understanding of banditry and try to identify entry points for policy and programmatic responses to address the issue.

Theoretical framework

The theory of relative deprivation (RD) is based on the concept that persons may feel deprived of some desirable thing relative to their own past, other persons or groups, or some other social category.

Methods

This paper employs qualitative research tools to explore the cause and ripple effects of banditry in Katsina state. Key informant interview with stakeholders and focus group discussion with members of communities were conducted to elicit data.

The data collected were transcribed, analysed thematically and presented in narratives. The questions generated were used to form themes which guided the presentation of findings. Qualitative Data miner software was used in the analysis.

Findings

Banditry today has come to be associated with its most common manifestations including “kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources.”⁴ Typically, these acts are perpetrated by a loose collection of rural armed criminal groups. The explanations of the origins and motivations behind the contemporary semi-structured wave of violence differ, with analyses alternatively placing emphasis on rural organized crime, conflict over land use between farmers and herders, and violence between

Fulani and Hausa, amongst other causes all exacerbated by climate change and the lack of employment.

Community perceptions of bandit groups corroborate earlier research depicting them as comprised of largely distinct, organized groups, albeit with shifting configurations and subject to fragmentation. Bandit groups operate in highly mobile, armed, and largely forest-based units that use quick-strike attacks on motorbikes against communities. Their motivations are primarily perceived as economic/financial by victims, including the notable subsection of the sample of Fulanis who have been victimized by bandits.

For the surveyed communities, weapons are the most recognizable feature of bandit groups. This bears critical implications for the potential for escalation of violence, further proliferation of illicit arms and ammunition including in the neighbouring regions, community violence reduction efforts and future DDR programming. Victimization experiences differ considerably with gender, age, and location in the North West. While physical violence and killings disproportionately affect adult men, sexual violence appears to especially affect women and girls (although it likely remains underreported). Variations of victimization across states indicate the volatile and dynamic nature of overall banditry presence and violence.

Conclusion

Banditry violence has profound and pervasive effects on the physical safety, access to income-generating activities, education, and mobility of residents in the northwestern communities surveyed. The perceived intensity and frequency of attacks are on the rise, with one in three respondents reporting experiencing weekly attacks in recent years. Close to two-thirds of respondents have family members who have been attacked by bandits.

Recommendation

- i. In light of both frequent and increasingly violent attacks, with weapons being the most recognizable feature of bandit groups, concerted measures on the national, state, and local levels surrounding weapons and ammunition management (WAM) are essential.
- ii. Given the pervasive presence and proliferation of illicit arms and ammunition in the North West—a region known for sparse state governance—and given also bandit groups' high mobility, there is an increased risk of intensified illicit arms trafficking including across Nigeria's borders.
- iii. Strengthened coordination among arms control institutions such as the NCCSALW, border security and law enforcement in both Nigeria and neighbouring countries in the Lake Chad Basin would help address the illicit cross-border flow of weapons into, and out of the country.

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