Rethinking Nigeria's Security Threats: Armed Banditry and its Impacts on the People of North-west Nigeria, 2010-2025

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Abstract

This discourse which is intended to contribute to peace and security studies examined the effects of armed banditry on the people of North-western Nigeria. The paper answered these questions: Who are armed bandits? What is the modus operandi (mode of operations) of these bandits? How has banditry affected the people in North-west Nigeria? Different materials were reviewed and they associated armed banditry with the level of economic underdevelopment and infrastructural decay in the region viz-a-viz the influx of criminal elements, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, etc. The sociological and queer ladder theories were advanced and employed to explain the rationale behind the abnormal behavior of these terrorists as adduced. The inability of the military not only to de-escalate this violence but to curtail the activities of these armed bandits is responsible for mass abduction and kidnapping of people for ransom within the context of this study. Oral interviews were conducted to give fillip to the interdisciplinary nature of the paper, considering the avalanche of literature consulted across different disciplines. The paper's submission is that the attendant woes of armed banditry on the people are incalculable in terms of humans, environment, economy, distortion and dislocation of families, among other attendant consequences. The paper recommended the continuous need for synergy among the security agencies while there is a need for protection of the citizens, considering the wave of insecurity in North-west Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria, Security, Banditry, Impacts, People, North-west.

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Introduction

The emerging security threat in Nigeria is an extension of the security issues in the Sahel region (Dambazzau, 2025). The latter statement was made by a former minister of interior in a recent dialogue series. The Nigerian political space and socio-political environment is bedevilled with security challenges, which have persisted for years despite efforts by government through the military to stem the current tide. In the recent past, certain groups decided to unleash terror on citizens especially in the North western Nigeria, namely Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Taraba States. Terror and armed banditry have had dire consequences on national security. It is "believed that the nitty-gritty of what constitutes these problems could be largely connected to concerns about food, health, education, environment, unemployment among other critical issues" (Kamil, 2019, pp. 33-43). More worrisome is that the tragedy of insecurity in Nigeria could have been averted if the nation had taken these issues more seriously. There is an aphorism that the government lacks the capacity to protect and secure her citizens. Armed banditry and other forms of social vices are assuming different dimensions whereby families of victims are coerced to pay ransom before they are released. In the past, bandits were known to rustle animals especially cattle from Fulani herders, but it metamorphosed to include forcefully adopting humans and demanding ransom. The unabated challenges of banditry and other nefarious acts have spiraled out of proportion and have become the biggest threats to stability in contemporary times (Kamil, 2019, pp. 48-49). While acknowledging the stark realities of armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgents like the Boko-Haram phenomenon, armed banditry has intensified and taken its toll on the people residing in some parts of north-west Nigeria which is the subject of discourse.[3]

Literature Review

A Discourse on Insecurity

The growing rate of security challenges especially today incites not just questions considered to be germane to this paper, but evokes reactions from the general populace. These issues would continue to pose a serious challenge for policy makers, development experts and practitioners of African diplomacy in the 21st century. Peter (2008, p. 66) explained that terror is something that can be inflicted upon people by governments as well as by non-state actors. More so, the growth of "religious fundamentalism" over the past thirty (30) years has seen a number of armed groups emerge, which are inspired essentially by religious doctrine. Globalization also allied to increase state arms surpluses since the end of the Cold War, which has also contributed to disaffected non-state groups finding it easier to avail themselves of weapons with the proceeds of their fundraising activities (Peter, 2008, pp.69-75). In relation

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3.　The first co-author, Esamagu is conversant with the North-east, having lived partly in Kaduna and spent many years in Katsina state.

to Nigeria, the exposition brought to the fore that especially with the return to the democratic era in 1999, non-state actors gradually started gaining momentum and with time expanded their activities with reckles abandon. Access to state arms over the years seems to have exacerbated the situation with consequential impacts on the people.

In a recent exposition on the impact of insecurity on Nigeria's national development since the fourth republic, Dare and Akintomiwa (2025, p. 91) were unequivocal in their submission that Africa's most populous nation and largest economy is bedeviled with security threats like terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, and herders-farmers conflicts. It is no longer news that these issues continually strain the nation's resources and impinge on the annual budget. The level of security determines the level of national development expected to occur because development can only thrive in an atmosphere largely devoid of persistent security issues. Critical areas affected by insecurity were highlighted by the duo, they range from low foreign direct investment (FDI), displaced populations, and weakened institutional capacities, which inadvertently deepen poverty and unemployment. Assessing the situation, they stressed the need to address underlying reasons of discontent which manifest in poverty, inequality, and defective governance in Nigeria (Dare & Akintomiwa, 2005, p. 91-92). It is hoped that if leadership is serious about the debilitating security challenges by first addressing leadership debacle, insecurity will be easily tackled.

Minka and Opeyeoluwa (2023, p. 38) in their conceptualisation of insecurity generally and in Nigeria examined the incidences of terrorism in the Sahel region of Africa with its impacts on regional security. This lends credence to the previous assertion by Dambazzau (2025) about insecurity being an extension of security issues in the Sahel region. These issues fester because of sustained bad governance and inability of the states to nip in the bud the underlying cause of terrorism which inadvertently stalls development. Non-state actors are not powerful than leaders saddled with the opportunities to govern the people, but political leaders have not been able to wield the right political will to rout forms of terrorism from the region being considered. Insecurity has intensified to the extent that state actors, including the formal military apparatus have fallen victims to non-state actors and this has repeatedly occurred in the Nigerian situation in the recent past. To comprehend the security situation in Nigeria, it is important to perceive it from the struggle for dominance between the states and emergent terrorist groups in the region including the Islamic State (IS) with cells in Chad, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger; Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun and Al-Qaeda in the Magreb, among others. Their networks have expanded into the Sahel and have not been contained (Minka & Opeyeoluwa, 2023, p. 41). While drawing a conclusion, they surmised that national and regional initiatives have been rendered impotent (Minka & Opeyeoluwa, 2023, p. 47). This analysis enables us to have a better grasp of the situation and how more synergy is required at that level to curb this menace, considering how porous our borders are in this part of the continent and world.

Banditry

It is believed that these "terrorist acts are strikingly new patterns of migration in the post-colonial era, which reflect patterns formed around new process of globalisation currently changing and remodelling the world" (Akinyemi, 2019, pp. 68-70). To her, the sour point in Nigeria's north eastern border with security implications is the occasional attacks and banditry (Akinyemi, 2019, p. 70), thus, this set of groups collaborate with local criminal elements in perpetrating these crimes. With time, they have been able to traverse communities and use certain difficult terrain and forests as their hideout, where they perpetrate their evil activities. In a policy brief in 2019, "North-Western Governors began negotiating with a number of armed bandits operating in the region from July 2019 to curb the menace and further boost internal security in the affected states. While it produced results with a drastic decline in attacks, there were renewed attacks by bandits in Zamfara, Katsina and Niger States between November and December 2019 (Nigeria, 2019, pp. 2-12). Although a committee was set up to find solutions to banditry in Zamfara State, the report failed to unveil concrete steps taken to stem the tide and assuage the plight of the people who have always been victims of banditry. Banditry has an appealing method of income in Northwest Nigeria where weak governance, youth unemployment, poverty and inequality leave people with depleted options for livelihood (Claire, 2021, par 4).

Nkasi (par 1) opined that North-western Nigeria faces devastating attacks from armed bandits, particularly in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger and Sokoto. These attacks are driven by many overlapping factors ranging from cattle rustling, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, illicit artisanal mining, youth unemployment, poverty to inequality. This presupposes that perhaps, such anomalies could have been averted if the various state governments had been proactive and addressed socio-economic challenges, which had existed for years and still exist. A dispassionate examination of the above region reveals the level of poverty and social backwardness in terms of education and social schemes not provided for the people. It is an established fact that banditry is a terrorist act considering the fact that the bandits brandish sophisticated weapons and are brash towards their victims. As opined by Benjamin, this terrorist act is meant to spread fear and undermine the government of the country, while the major driving forces of terrorism are tailored towards fundamentalism, nationalism and secessionism. These bandits seek to draw unnecessary attention to themselves in order to gain cheap popularity. Beyond being dissident, rebels and social misfits in the society, they contest with the state for power (Benjamin, 2019, p. 13). However, the activities of these criminals are bereft of any clearly defined objectives or persuasive ideological belief. In tandem with Benjamin's allusion, the reasons for these evil acts are not far-fetched and they include bad governance and corruption, youth bulges and unemployment, among others. Quite significant is that the teeming growing and young population has been neglected over the years by previous and successive governments.

In recent years, armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom as it affects the people have grave implication on national security. Polycarp (2020, p. 4) stated that "banditry stalls business activities in the areas where it occurs as well as instills fear in the minds of Nigerians. The perpetrators are mostly youths, who are lost to such criminal activities instead of being gainfully employed as productive citizens for Nigeria's development". Polycarp's assertion further reinforces Akinyemi's statement that armed banditry in the northern part of Nigeria can be traced to rebels and bandits suspected to have migrated from neighbouring countries, especially taking into consideration the porosity of Nigeria's borders. This further provided background information in the understanding of their mean disposition, which is reflected in kidnapping even the female folk and children who are mostly helpless and can hardly defend themselves. Also, "African states that share borders with Nigeria have been plagued with the same challenge due to lapses in national security apparatuses, uncoordinated state security agencies, weak collaborative efforts and ineffective legal regulatory framework. Economic underdevelopment within Nigeria and in the north due to lack of good roads, communication, basic facilities and industries necessary for generation of employment and modern infrastructure are preconditions for alarming cases of banditry" (Polycarp, 2020, p. 15). The situation is further complicated by the existence of large unregulated and poor government-controlled forest areas (Nigeria, 2019, p. 4). These forests have become safe and ungoverned spaces for these bandits to operate freely and some of their activities and attacks are launched from there.

The era before and after the return to democracy had not witnessed the level and steady rise in insecurity like the current scenario. Let us take an example of Zamfara State with a population mostly agrarian in nature. The state, topography and discussions around one or two natural resources enable us to understand not only the emergence of armed banditry but its attendant crimes (kidnapping, culpable homicide and cattle rustling) in an environment considered to be very peaceful in the past. The phenomenon of armed banditry is driven by criminal quest for economic accumulation in an environment that more or less condones crimes. It has been exacerbated by the prevailing socio-economic discontent and attendant livelihood crisis in the state, in addition to the seeming indolence of relevant government agencies towards arresting the ugly situation (Mustapha, 2019, pp. 1219-1220). Quite significant is that the writer highlighted that the violence is characterised with brutal and wanton killings, sexual intimidation among women, children and kidnapping for ransom. On the other hand, we are yet to witness well designed and sustainable implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction measures by government to bring succour to the victims of banditry (Mustapha, 2019, pp. 1221-1222). Okoli and Okpaleke (2014, pp. 350-362) likened banditry to armed robbery which increases daily, and is motivated by criminal intent to material acquisition. They are unequivocally related to the issue of unemployment, poverty and socio-economic malaise, which creates an atmosphere of livelihood crisis in society. This predisposes people to sundry tactics of survival, which entail criminal indulgence.

Armed banditry in relation to its victims proves attractive to the perpetrators, just as they realise enough funds from their victims. It heightened the vulnerability of women and girls in the North West. A gory picture was painted of some women in the affected communities who were faced with early widowhood or death of their children, while some children have become orphans and forced to flee their villages for safety. Quite appalling is the critical human security concern which reveals that they also suffer varied forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Reference has also been made to several cases of rape by bandits in Katsina and Niger States (Nigeria, 2019, p. 6). Though the focus of this review is on armed banditry, we were also faced with the trajectory of their activities as well as their modus operandi (mode of operation) in recent time. Their disregard and defilement of women presuppose the depth of moral bankruptcy and the need to revive and reinforce the moral values and virtue ethics in the country. Closely related to the incidence of banditry is an avalanche of 'ungoverned' and 'ungovernable' spheres within the territorial domain of the focal area and the government has persistently failed to muster requisite political will and commitment to tackle the situation (Okoli & Anthony, 2019, pp. 210-211).

Armed banditry can only be understood presently in the context in which it began, for example, cattle rustling which recently became a major internal security concern in Nigeria, with the country's northern region as the epicentre. It only transformed and perpetrators added a new vice of capturing people in return for ransom. Azeez and Aliyu (2016, p. 97) stated that "Northern Nigeria has experienced an unrestrained escalation of cattle rustling, with maiming, raping and pillaging". Though they did not provide data of raped victims to substantiate their claims, this however suggests that the ugly trend affects especially women and children. The duo further stressed that the conversion of forest reserves to locations of criminal activities and the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian security operatives create ungoverned spaces (Azeez & Aliyu, 2016, p. 99). The latter buttressed the assertion of Okoli and Anthony considered earlier. Conversely, it has been argued that "it is only the galloping inflation, receding economic development and unabated corruption that could compete with the ever increasing insurgency of kidnapping, armed banditry, drug trafficking, cattle rustling, and arms proliferation in the North West region of Nigeria" (Mungadi et al., 2020, p. 914). In tandem with the focal point of this study or review, they affirmed that "insurgency thrived amidst a booming organised crime of cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, gang raping..... This greatly retards productivity and opportunities for the people to earn a living" (Mungadi et al., 2020, p. 915).

Emmanuel and Titus (2023, p. 154) analysed the political economy of banditry in Nigeria considering how lucrative it has become for the perpetrators and beneficiaries of such nefarious acts. They stated that while it has become a prayer point for households in the north-west, it has steadily grown into a structured and organised institution with the creation of a social and economic system. This system negates the usual structure in the society and is an aberration. These bandits keep building structures and expanding their territories within the Nigerian territorial space. It is unfortunate how bandits have forced families of kidnapped victims to

pay ransom or part with their resources as they intensify their activities. They made reference to the penchant to get rich quickly, a syndrome which seems to pervade the country, not just the region being examined. Thus, unemployment is being employed as a devise to engage in this unwholesome practice of banditry. While they explained that poverty is a contributing factor to the thriving economy of banditry in Nigeria, there was no concrete information or data to connect all forms of criminal acts to it. More so, the political economy of banditry keeps expanding because there is little deterrence. They recommended that the political and economic structure of bandits needs to be disrupted while the government on her part should strategically invest more on national security (Emmanuel & Titus 2023, p. 160-162).

The conspiracy involved in the governance of ungoverned spaces metamorphosed from terrorism in the form of Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani militancy to banditry. To add to the manifold security conundrum, the new group known as bandits "operates under the guise of kidnapping and cattle rustling, while they carry out deadly attacks on villages in states such as Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto, not to mention Niger State where they have severally hoisted their flag. There is a strong link between governance failure and banditry. We also have evidences of Fulani herdsmen who have lost their herds to bad weather, diseases or to violence such as Boko Haram invasion and activities of bandits" (John, 2020, pp. 77-110). Several scholars also construe banditry as an organised crime and failed states are often vulnerable to banditry. In essence, the authors perceive their activities as a failure of leadership disposition and orientation. It is a "manifestation of a failure of government machinery or governmental systems as may be revealed by a thorough and dispassionate examination of past conflicts" (Bukar, 2015, p. 17). The authors approached this discourse from the perspective of its impact on the people and suggested that proactive measures should be evolved to deal with insecurity generally in North-west Nigeria and the country at large.

Theoretical Framework: Sociological and Queer Ladder Theories
For the purpose of this study, and clarity of analysis, different theories were adopted to x-ray the subject matter of armed banditry and its implication on the people. Irrespective of the nomenclature attached to their activities, it must be emphasised that it is an act of terrorism. Sociological theorists like Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton, among others who are not necessarily founders of this theory, as it cannot be traced to an individual but are key figures in developing it "generally assert that criminal behaviour is a normal response of biologically and psychologically normal individuals to particular kinds of social circumstance" (Britannica, par 1). Such conditions that predispose individuals to evil and arouse the evil tendencies in them are abnormal and criminal in character. This results in an increase in profit-oriented crimes. It is believed that "crime and delinquency could be premised on the social structural factors (e.g., poverty and social disorganisation)" (Krohn, Massey and Skinner 455). This theory is fundamental to understanding contemporary crime problems like banditry and the cash realsed by these bandits from kidnapping. Aigbove and Osese referred to Adolphe

Quetelet and others who demonstrated explicitly that crime statistics vary in relation to factors like poverty, age, etc. (221).

Similarly, the queer ladder theory was influenced and propounded by an American Sociologist, Daniel Bell (1919-2011). He evolved the idea of 'queer ladder' in an attempt to explain the instrumental essence of organised crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing. The theory proposes that individuals or groups may turn to criminal activities as a "queer ladder" to climb out of poverty and lack of power, especially when traditional avenues for social mobility are restricted. Contextualising queer ladder theory in Nigeria, it serves as the premise for understanding the rise in kidnapping and banditry, particularly in the north-west where factors like poverty, poor education facilities, weak governance structures have contributed to the dire situation. The existence of these criminals and many others poses different unanswered questions. Michael and Gary (2007, p. 59) raised questions like "Why are some criminals but not others involved with organised crime? Is organised crime a planned criminal phenomenon or a side effect of some other social problem, such as poverty or lack of education?" One cannot rule out greed, insatiable desire for wealth and competition with the political class as underlying factors for the propensity and execution of violence by these nihilist groups. On the side of government, failure to initiate the right policies is partly responsible for this planned criminality. Worthy of note is the fact that financial incentives clearly play an important role in the decision of these criminals to brazenly perpetrate this heinous crime. An extension of the queer ladder theory explained that ethnic succession develops as one group replaces the other on the queer ladder of crime, while earlier group moves on to respectability along with legitimate social status and livelihood (Michael & Gary, 2007, p. 68).

There is a wide and deep cleavage between wealth and income distribution vis-a-vis the rich and poor in the Nigerian society. It has been asserted that the "cleavage results in poverty, unemployment and eventually a corresponding increase in urban crimes such as armed robbery, ...kidnapping closely associated with banditry" (Chukwu & Chinelo, 2019, p. 283). More so, they stated that poverty and unemployment complemented one another on the largest possible scale, with evident propensity for the people to resort to other means, other than lawful and socially accepted means in satisfying their basic needs. This only reinforces the lacuna in governance that might have given fillip to the emergence viz-a-viz the preponderance in the activities of bandits. In line with the purpose of this paper, the sociological and queer ladder theories enable us to come to terms with armed banditry and the extent of their activities on the locals.

Overview of Armed Banditry in North-Western Nigeria

History is replete with notorious criminals who had terrorised certain parts of the country. In 1986, specifically, Anini's gang was dismantled and in March 1987, they were executed. In the 1990s, Shina Rambo became prominent for similar escapades in parts of the South-West.

By the 2000s, commercial kidnapping, political violence and assassinations emerged as dominant crimes. Parts of South-eastern Nigeria were noted for breakdown of law and order with security taken over by bandits regarded as Bakassi Boys (Chidi, 2018, par 7). From the year 2009, insecurity assumed a different dimension in the form of Boko Haram, cultists, herdsmen, kidnappers, militants and bandits in recent years who are vociferous in executing their evil activities. Generally, armed banditry began as farmer/herder conflict in 2011 and intensified around 2017 to 2018 to include: cattle rustling kidnapping for ransom, sexual violence and killings. It is believed that the "effect of the war in neighbouring countries such as Libya, Niger, Chad and the 'Kwanta-Kwanta' phenomenon in Borno State where armed individuals crossed the border into Nigeria and perpetrated crimes unhindered snowballed into banditry (Fidelis, 2021, par 7). The "decision of the Zamfara State Government to clear large forests and cattle grazing reserves in part of the Kuyanbana forest and Gidan Jaja areas of Maru and Zurmi Local Governments for farming resulted in the dislocation of many Fulani hamlets" (Fidelis, 2021, par 11). This made them to be an embittered group coupled with the porosity of our borders. In an interview with Dr. Mukhtar, he traced the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria with particular reference to armed banditry to the "fringes of the North-western states of Kebbi, Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa upward to Maiduguri border where border administration has become a serious challenge to security and even to the societies living in those borders" (Abubakar, 2021, par 3). There were also issues about exploitation of these herdsmen by corrupt district heads in collaboration with farmers, corrupt police and judges (Fidelis par 11-12). Thus, this organised criminality evolved as an alternative to the prevalent social circumstances and problems in a bid to survive harsh economic measures and serial extortions. In a recent dialogue series, a former chief of army staff and minister of interior averred that though banditry is yet to be criminalised like some groups in Nigeria, their activities point to the axiom that they are criminals (Dambazzau, 2025).

In the North, "there is an unceasing social injustice and inequitable distribution of common wealth. In the country at large, the fewer richer populace are getting richer while the ever-increasing assemblage of the poorer fragments are becoming tremendously booming in dearth" (John, 2020, pp. 77-110). The aforementioned serves as a precursor to the wave of banditry within the area where it is prevalent. An expert on peace, security and humanitarian studies extended the rationale for banditry beyond ideological and economic to include political undertone (Albert, 2025). These criminals seek to carve a government of their own within Nigeria's territory. Cattle rustling by armed gangs and bandits appears to differ in terms of scale and economic consequences in "ungoverned" spaces (Gadzama, et al., 2014, p. 42), incorporating kidnapping and mass abduction of people is not only a criminal enterprise but has proven to be economically viable for the perpetrators. "The kidnapping 'deal' is not consummated with a sort of exchange. The substance of this exchange is ransoming (payment of a ransom), which was the essence of the kidnapping endeavour" (Okoli & Agada, 2014, pp. 139-140). This trend though unprofessional is an opportunist crime and has become

more sophisticated in the past few years. More worrisome is the alarming rate at which these non-state actors whisk away vulnerable persons. These bandits carry out their operations in defiance to law and order while they defy military strategies and operations due to the type of sophisticated weapons at their disposal. The northern part of the country is the "most volatile in the country in recent times with the spate of attacks from these insurgent groups and terrorist organisation. The activities of armed bandits have intensified and the obnoxious campaign of terrorism indeed has a diverse dimension which complicates Nigeria's problems" (Mevayerore, par 6). In an area where poverty is deeply rooted, illiteracy is extremely high, cattle rearing is the preoccupation of a group of people and their sources of livelihood are threatened whether by nature or human intervention (Adedeji par 5). People react to circumstances differently and evolve strategies just like the sociological theorists postulated. Their effort to survive, penchant and avarice are responsible for the persistent kidnapping for ransom, having explored the weak and ineffective security apparatus in the country.

Results of Findings

The Impacts of Armed Banditry on the People of North-west Nigeria

This paper has established the axiom that people living in local communities are victims of such terrorist attacks, extending the sociological discourse on crime and criminality by Krohn, Massey and Skinner. While banditry has persisted for years, most of the armed bandits have means of mobility, with their expertise in driving, they have continued to attack communities, raid villages and ransack in an unrestrained manner. These criminals usually leave in their trail tales of woes, anguish, regrets, sorrows, blood, destruction and incalculable loss, damage to the environment as well as the people. The growth in strength and sophistication of bandits make them to be dreaded even as they impose and foist their ideologies and beliefs on their captives using strategies and tactics such as intimidation (Mavayerore, par 5). Thus, they disillusion the good opinions and psyche of their victims. They alter their thought pattern, as they experience psychopathic disorder even after being released, if not administered psychotherapy by psychologists. The dastardly action of armed bandits creates fear in the mind of everyone in the communities where this occurs. Lending credence to the latter statement, Moses posited that "the terror generated by armed banditry was a critical factor that induced displacement and subsequently delayed later return and resettlement, while psychological trauma was a major consequence of the activities of bandits" (Mevayerore, par 6-7). Generally, violent situations culminate in predisposing victims to fear in their subconscious and might not be easily erased or forgotten.

Unfortunately, armed banditry results in abduction of people. A 400 level student, faculty of education, Federal University Dutsinma (FUDMA), Naomi Ene, alongside others were kidnapped from their residences (Oral Interview: Naomi, 2025). These armed bandits are not different from their Boko Haram counterparts who sexually defile their female victims, thus leading to traumatic disorder. Sexual violence is closely associated with the activities of

armed bandits in north eastern Nigeria (ACAP, par 1). These criminals are known for Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), thus they heighten the vulnerability of women and girls in the region (Nigeria, 2019, p. 6), (Mustapha, 2019, p. 1221). Azeez and Aliyu (2016, pp. 95-97) buttressed the statement that there is an unrestrained escalation of cattle rustling alongside banditry, raping and pillaging which is quite evident in the process. Furthermore, during incidents of armed violence such as armed banditry, the direct consequences for women who are victims of sexual violence are manifold: psychological trauma, pregnancy and the spread of HIV (Moses, 2013, p. 6). To further buttress the decaying standards of morality among these bandits and the rate at which they sexually abused their female victims, the news was awash with the arrest of a notorious bandit in Sokoto while buying sex enhancers. (Omeiza B1t; Channels Television B1t; The News B1t). This is a representation of the challenge attached with the queer ladder theory, it promotes deviant behaviour which is unreasonable.

It has been asserted that these bandits in the process of raiding communities usually kill people, which explains the sociological and queer ladder theories. They never have regard for lives as being sacred and the overall impact will certainly last for generations. The magnitude of their activities overwhelms government with growing threat which claims lives in large number. Several children are becoming orphans and women are becoming widows overnight because their husbands are killed by these deadly groups (Adedeji, 2021, par 2). One of our interviewees narrated the case of Dr Tiri Gyang of the Faculty of Agriculture, Federal University Dutsinma (FUDMA), Katsina State whose residence was attacked. He was shot dead and his two sons, Derek and Caleb were kidnapped (Oral Interview: Benjamin, 2025). Another individual interviewed mentioned his cousins who were killed by these marauders and nihilist group in Kaduna (Oral Interview: Michael Oboh, 2025). The challenge posed by this nature of criminality turns majority into becoming destitute. In cases where women solely depend on their husbands for provision of daily meals, the death of these men creates vacuum and poverty. The children in a bid to survive the harsh economic condition are sometimes enticed into social vices like armed banditry. As soon as the youths are impoverished and marginalised by economic realities, they become available and ready to be mobilised, thus, they can easily be manipulated (Moses, 2013, p. 26). Moses also opined that contrary to traditional norms, women and children are not spared in operations of bandits, they bear the brunt in form of rape, torture and murder. This has become the real threat, i.e. banditry owing to the profit accrued from it, the coercion and strong bond among these criminals and the military's inability to properly access intelligent report to rout them. The dispositions of these bandits clearly align and represent Daniel Bell's exposition on "queer ladder" which promotes greed and insatiable quest for wealth.

Armed banditry as a phenomenon, their strategies and tactics assumed an unimaginable dimension in the last few years. It is laced and characterised by social dislocation and distortion of the family at large, direct consequences of crime and criminality. Some people relocate

from their local communities to safer environment because of the dire situation, not to mention livelihoods continuously destroyed. The case of Doris is an example, she had to relocate to Keffi in Nasarawa State from Goni-Gora in Kaduna State where she has continued with her business activities (Oral Interview: Doris, 2025). It is a fact which has been reiterated that maiming and killings are associated with the activities of bandits which have continued unabated (Azeez and Aliyu, 2016, p. 97). The indiscriminate action of kidnapping people for ransom persistently strains relationship, reduces the opportunity for extended conversation and imperceptibly creates a wide gap among them. Thus, sustainable peace, progress, growth, interaction and cohesion gradually elude the people within the region where this menace occurs. It is alarming that in some cases some women have been used to establish links with these bandits and are sent on errands (Nigeria, 2019, p. 6). As a result of the latter and strained relationship, vulnerable groups, especially women lack the capacity to support children education properly and household income (Nigeria, 2019, p. 7). In the long run, these children are exposed to unhealthy social vices due to neglect and unavailability of their parents occasioned by the activities of armed bandits.

Furthermore, the implication of banditry on the people cannot be overemphasised, especially considering its negative effects. It must be stressed that, it affects the productivity of the people especially in the communities without adequate security. Most of the people in the area under consideration live in constant fear of being attacked at home; on their farms, as such, many hardly go to their farms and are not engaged in agricultural activities. This reduces their input and output at home, work, farms and the society at large. In ACAP's special report, it stated that "livelihoods are being disrupted; fear and insecurity among the population increase. It went on to state that focus heightened for women, children and the elderly while security, food, water and sanitation hygiene (WASH) were priority needs in affected areas (par 1). With the increase in deaths occasioned by armed banditry, productivity is becoming an illusion. From 2011 to 2019, at least 8,000 people were killed mostly in Zamfara State with the bulk of the casualties which occurred over the last five years. Hundreds remained missing or unaccounted (International Crisis Group, 2020, p. 15). These people, men and women should have been able to contribute their quota to the development process if they were alive. This excludes the humanitarian impact which is not the focus of this paper. Poverty has become the mainstay with the attendant impacts of armed banditry (Saleh, 2016, p. 97). The people are daily affected due to reduction in number of animals used for traction and decrease in quantity of manure, which lead to reduced crop yield (Saleh, 2016, p. 97). The challenge of kidnap for ransom value (KRV) dissipates and stifles productivity by the people. This downplays the sociological and queer ladder theories notable for perceiving the penchant for criminality on the basis of poverty and social disorganisation.

Armed banditry disrupts the livelihood of the people while deepening the difficulties of the victims who bear the brunt of the actions and vices of these bandits. As discussed earlier, banditry reduces the productive capacity of the victims. Scarcity of food items can be traced

to inability of farmers who find it difficult to have access to their farms and cultivate or harvest agricultural products (Oral interview: Maikudi & Ibrahim, 2025). The action of these bandits poses danger of malnourishment especially for women and children whose labour largely aids in the cultivation of these farm produce. Dayo and Amina (2016, pp. 111-114) posited that "when services are rolled back, women bear the brunt... when the state fails to provide essential services; women are forced to stand in the gap because they and their children need to continue to live. Such unconventional roles for women are even more problematic in situations of conflict, strife or unrest" or in the case of armed banditry. Dayo and Amina (2016, p. 124) further stated that as experienced, communities lost more men than women but women were attacked as 'casualties of war'. These social bandits who progressively and steadily constitute a deliberate challenge to the people in the North-western region cripple their economic activities and only source of livelihood. Unfortunately, with the persistent kidnap of males and females for ransom, they have carved a niche for themselves by dominating informal sector, establishing small businesses and using violence and coercion to compete with legitimate business (Kyari and Chinyere, 2016, pp. 170-171). A study carried out in Kaduna State revealed that the faming activities of both Kaura and Birnin Gwari have been disrupted. This has snowball effect on the livelihood of the farming families and implications for food security, nutrition, health etc, as well as rising unemployment (Kyari and Chinyere, 2016, pp. 181-192). The magnitude of damage on the people occasioned by the activities of armed bandits increases daily within the scope of its operations. This upheaval has long term implications on the people.

Conclusion

The study examined another twist to Nigeria's security challenges with the emergence of armed banditry. This began as farmer/herder conflict in 2011 but later metamorphosed from 2017 to include cattle rustling, kidnapping people for ransom, sexual violence, amongst others. Adopting the sociological and queer ladder theories, it is believed that over the years, Nigeria's insecurity threats which include armed banditry is responsible for the death of the people in the communities where this occurs. The unjustifiable desire to survive, greed, avarice and intention to live like the political class have pushed those engaged in this deadly act to continue to carry out their activities without restraint. Other issues associated with armed banditry include psychological trauma, destitution and hopelessness about the situation with major means of survival destroyed. There is a drastic reduction in the level of productivity of the people in local communities ravaged by banditry. The study recognises the efforts of the military in stemming the tide of armed banditry, but considering how it has festered for years, a more holistic approach needs to be adopted by the government to forestall further loss of lives.

Recommendation and Policy Options

In tandem with the obvious activities of armed bandits as non-state actors, insecurity which is prevalent in some parts of the country and in view of its diverse negative implications on both genders, the following policy options were recommended as outlined below:

- There is an urgent need for the Federal, State and Local Governments, in collaboration with the relevant agencies to strengthen partnership with traditional authorities, faith-based institutions, women and youth groups to assist in stemming the menace of social vices. It is no more news that these armed bandits were not strangers but locals and in most cases familiar to the people.

- Government needs to be proactive and should also explore her relationship with the private sector in the provision of viable employment opportunities and skills acquisition. This will dissuade others from being enticed into this evil enterprise.

- The allocation, disbursement and spending of funds for the provision of sophisticated weapons useful in dealing with crime should be clearly monitored. With improved technology, the military can track, monitor and curb the influx of organised crime in the region and the country at large.

- The dire need for collaboration between the government and civil society organisations (CSOs) cannot be overemphasised in the rehabilitation of victims of armed bandits and terrorism in general.

- Rehabilitated victims of armed banditry i.e. both genders should be well catered for and empowered financially by the government, concerned groups and donor agencies.

- Traditional rulers need to be taught security tips to enable them detect strangers with questionable characters, inform their subjects and pass such intelligent reports to the military for immediate action.

- The bill on forest rangers should be expedited and given the necessary backing.

- There is no better time for the promulgation of state police than now. Government should introduce state police and properly equip them. The locals have the profundity of their terrain better than others.

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