

Armed Banditry, Coercive Approach and Human Security in the Northwest Nigeria

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Abstract: Localized banditry had swiftly grown with a bush fire effect consuming almost the entire Northwest geo-political region of Nigeria in recent times, its rapid transformation to becoming a more deadly attrition, and the potential of overturning the socio-economic, security and political wellbeing of the entire Northern region. This study examines the remote and immediate causes of tribalized security challenges as armed banditry, with a special interest from the aftermath of 2015 elections and the emergence of Muslim, Hausa-Fulani President, with an anti-corruption inclination, which coincided with unprecedented diverse uprisings and security impasses. The study also examines the armed banditry trend, extent of their appalling activities and how it affects socio-economic wellbeing within the affected region. The study further assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of coercive approach to such localized upheavals, leveraging on propositions of Securitization (Copenhagen) Theorist, whose primary assumptions are hinged around multifaceted approach to security; and their justification for taking extraordinary and rule breaking measures in handling insecurity. The study further explores effectiveness of forcible approaches in other context through a peer-review analysis to infer likely outcome of current strategy applied by Nigeria. The study offers more suitable solutions and proffer practical policy recommendations. Most recent studies on the subject matter would be studied and credible data from existing research would be reviewed.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, Military Solution, Human Security, Northwest, Nigeria

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Nigeria has recently seen a significant impediment in its socio-economic growth, owing to the emergence of several security threats, including armed banditry, abduction, insurgency, pastoralists/farmer conflict posing a serious threat to the country's national security (Akinbi, 2015). States like Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara amongst others, are affected by these increasing security challenges (Mahmoud, 2021). According to Olufemi (2015), about 462 trillion Naira has been spent on national security by Nigerian administrations in the last five years. The government's efforts to bring the threat to an end in order to avert a total breakdown of law and order appear to have failed to produce the expected beneficial outcome, (Olufemi, 2015).

The term "banditry" refers to the presence or prevalence of armed robbery or other forms of violent crime. It entails the use of force, or the threat of force, to frighten someone with the purpose to rob, rape, or murder them. Banditry is a crime committed against people (Adewuyi, 2021). In modern

societies, it has become a widespread genre of crime as well as a source of violence (Nigeria Watch, 2011). In modern Nigeria, rural banditry linked to cattle rustling has become a serious public policy concern. It refers to the theft of cattle and animals from herders, as well as livestock raiding from ranches. It is increasingly an economically based form of criminality perpetuated via informal networks, despite being driven by many demands and circumstances (Mahmoud, 2021). In the framework of subsistence and commercial pastoralism, rural banditry thrives as a form of 'primitive' cowherd accumulation. The upsetting of pastoralist transhuman activities led to the most alarming results. Rape, kidnapping, organized attacks and looting on villages and communities, are all common features of rural banditry (Adewuyi, 2021).

The notion of human security was introduced in the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994, which focuses on people (UNDP 1994). The same document asserts that the term "security" has long been construed too narrowly in the context of "security of territory from foreign assault," and so implies that human security entails far more than the absence of conflict. The emphasis is now formally shifted from state security to human security. Human security is defined as "protection from chronic dangers such as starvation, disease, and repression, as well as protection from sudden and detrimental disturbances in regular life patterns - whether in homes, jobs, or communities," (UNDP, 1994). Human security within this context is centered around: Economic Security; Food Security; Health Security; Environmental Security; Personal Security; Community Security and Political Security (Adewuyi, 2021).

Despite the outcomes of the 2013 rebasing of the Nigerian economy, which ranked the country as the 28th largest in the world and the largest in Africa, with per capita GDP rising from \$1,555 to \$2,688, the country's human security situation has remained problematic. Nigeria, for example, has been ranked low on the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) report, which focuses on life expectancy, school enrolment, and income indices, and similarly low on the Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) since 2010; the report ranked Nigeria 153 in 2011 and 2012, and 152 in 2013 and 2017 (Premium Times, 2017), among the countries measured. These rankings reveal the dismal reality of Nigerians' diminishing material well-being. Africa's biggest economy dropped three spots to 161 in 2019 from 158 in 2018 among 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index

(HDI), according to a new report released by the (UNDP) (Business Day, 2020).

Nigeria's diminishing global standing as a peaceful country where people can live happily demonstrates the human security challenge the country is affected with. It was formerly known as having one of the happiest populations on the planet, but it has since devolved into a country torn apart by civil war, bloodshed, and various crimes, including rural banditry, which has made life oppressive. Nigeria is the 17th least peaceful country in the world, according to the 2014 Fragile States Ranking of Fund for Peace Index 2014, which rated 178 countries based on factors such as security, conflict intensity, and militarization. The survey notes that the level of peace in Nigeria has decreased by 5% since 2008, and those nations such as Chad, Lebanon, and Yemen are more peaceful than Nigeria (The Fund for Peace, 2014).

Criminals are having a field day, killing, maiming, and extorting victims, and Nigeria's security apparatus is currently overwhelmed. Almost every section of Nigeria is currently dealing with some type of insecurity, with numerous crimes continuing virtually unchecked. The police, who are underfunded and under-motivated, and the military, which is fighting a decade-long insurgency in the North-east, appear to be at a loss on how to stop the security slide. Bandits have essentially taken over swaths of the North-West, kidnapping for ransom and killing victims who cannot pay for their release (All Africa, 2021).

Gangs in Katsina and Kaduna stage cattle raids and abductions from the Davin Rugu Forest to the east and south. Raids on farmers and pastoralists by armed gangs heighten existing community tensions and increase demand for guns in the region, which the armed gangs then provide, resulting in even worsening security. Militant Islamist organisations are paying attention to the actions of these organized gangs in the Northwest. Ansaru has sent clerics to the region to preach against democracy and peace initiatives by the government. There is also evidence that ISWAP is forming relationships with criminal gangs in the Northwest in an attempt to radicalize them (Africa Center, 2021).

At present, Nigeria is regarded as one of the most dangerous places to live in. The 2020 Global Terrorism Index identified it specifically as the third most affected by terrorism, after Afghanistan and Iraq (Global Terrorism Index, 2020)

1.1. Introduction

Nigeria has today become a stage for the showcase of killer-apititudes beset by a heap of undesirable situations. The country's problems are most visible in the spate of armed violence and criminality that has erupted in various sections of the country. The catastrophically violent security environment in northern Nigeria explains this bizarre predicament more than anything else. Despite the government's shaky counter-insurgency efforts, the Boko Haram scourge continues to

ravage North-Eastern Nigeria (Okoli, 2014; Zenn, 2018; Kirfi, et al., 2021). Herdsmen militancy has affected the North-central region, plunging the region into a humanitarian disaster. The North-Western region, particularly Zamfara, Katsina and parts of the Sokoto States, has recently seen an increase in rural banditry and kidnapping along its national routes and international borders as well as in the forested interior. It is truly repulsive and mind-numbing to think about the issues that characterize livelihood in the Northwestern part of Nigeria (Kirfi et al., 2021; Ojewale, 2021).

Cattle rustling, the growth of small arms and light weapons, chronic youth unemployment, unlawful artisanal mining, poverty and inequality and, most crucially, the developing instability across West Africa are all driving the crime (Campbell, 2020). The attacks' intractability is exacerbated by the military's corrupted and demoralized status, which has been overstretched by its deployment in many of the federation's states. Despite the government's declaration that the terrorist group has been 'technically defeated,' the military's engagement in a war with them in the North-East has entered its second decade, with no quick possibility of triumph (Onapajo, 2017). Though they are affiliated with a number of different organizations, it is usually assumed that the majority of the bandits are Fulani from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Senegal, and Mali (Campbell, 2020: Vanguard, 2020).

The current banditry situation in northern Nigeria is the culmination of years of deteriorating political, economic, and security conditions. Since pre-colonial times, what is now Northwestern Nigeria has faced cattle rustling and highway robbery as a rural region and trans-Saharan trading hub. However, as recently as fifteen years ago, criminality in the region was largely non-lethal, and bandits were limited in number. However, as a result of rising tensions between farmers and herders, as well as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons throughout West Africa, exacerbated by Libya's collapse in 2011, the number of armed gangs has grown substantially, (Barnett and Rufai, 2021).

Mohammed Adamu, Former Inspector General of Police was quoted to have said the following:

We have realised that most of the banditry has an international dimension. The bandits come from outside the country. We arrested Sudanese, Nigeriens and Malians, among other nationals. When we operated in Kaduna, Birnin Gwari, where we attacked a group of bandits, we realised that most of them came from Islamic State of West Africa, who are terrorists, kidnapping for ransom. So, the issue is not at the level you are looking at it, it is a big issue, and we must work together to address it" (Vanguard, 2020).

The government upped its deployment in response to the escalating armed banditry in the region. Security deployment was heightened to the impacted states, resulting in the arrest, and killing of a number of bandits. Despite the military

intervention, the gangs' brutal attacks significantly worsened, rendering the use of coercion ineffective. In 2019, the states of the Northwestern States reached an amnesty deal with the bandits. When Governor Masari underlined that negotiated amnesty is still the best option to achieve long-term peace and tranquility of the region (Campbell, 2020: Sunday, 2021).

The negotiated amnesty deal, however, did not yield the expected outcomes, as armed banditry in the region expanded substantially. The bargain entailed the bandits being disarmed, the abducted victims being released, and, most crucially, the bandits being granted amnesty rather than being prosecuted in exchange for an undisclosed monetary reward. The approach rather than initiating de-escalation, it spiraled in an opposite manner, escalating the situation across Northwest and beyond (Sunday, 2021: Ojewale, 2021).

In the fight against any form of harsh criminality, such as banditry and kidnapping, the government, whether at the state or national level, devises tools and strategies to curtail, lessen, or control the threat(s). This entails the formalization of structures as well as inter-institutional collaboration in order to integrate community/non-community efforts and improve information gathering in order to achieve successful security service delivery (Agatu, 2018). The rise in insecurity in Zamfara and parts of Sokoto States has forced members of the affected communities and government officials at both the state and national levels to go back to the drawing board and rethink the "baby-sitting" approach to the problem, which has failed to produce the desired results (Shinkafi, 2019).

The peace pact, which appeared to give the Fulani's additional concessions while ignoring the Hausas, sparked ethnic riots and escalated tensions between Hausa vigilantes and Fulani herders, who are now collectively referred to as "bandits and kidnapers" by some sections of the populace (ACAPS, 2020).

That we have a serious national security challenge is an understatement, but the situation is not hopeless if only President Buhari will rise to the occasion. First, he must recognize that many people, from a former Army Chief to respected emirs, have lost faith in the institutions that are meant to protect the people" (This Day, 2018).

The discovery of gold reserves in sections of the impacted areas (Zamfara and Kaduna) raises the possibility that proprietorship of these reserves may be challenged by the government, illegal miners, and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs), resulting in increased banditry, violence, and population displacement. An estimated 80% of mining in the region is done on an artisanal basis, with covert, unlicensed mining also taking place (Institute for Security Studies, 2020). When it was suspected that banditry activities were being used as a cover for illegal mining in unregulated areas, the Nigerian government formally banned mining activities in the northwest (Ojewale, 2021). This hasn't stopped gold from being smuggled into neighboring countries, nor has it stopped the issue from worsening. The porous and close borders

between Nigeria and Niger (Jibia in Katsina and Iela in Sokoto) facilitate unlawful cross-border movement of people and goods relationships with other NSAGs (ACAPS, 2020). Illegal mining in the Northwest caused violent local confrontations. According to Dr Chris Kwaja, a Senior Researcher at Modibbo Adama University of Technology in Yola, Nigeria, these 'sponsors' are protected by some state governments and act as if they are above the law (Institute for Security Studies, 2020). Even when the governors of Katsina, Niger, and Zamfara states had talks with illicit mining sponsors, it was under conditions set by the sponsors, demonstrating their political clout and official protection.

While the quasi-amnesty deal was not successful, it was argued that there is no military solution to intra-state security challenges as banditry. This argument was echoed by Prof. Yusuf in a live webinar organized by Centre for Investigative Reporting in April 2020 titled: 'Nigeria's insecurity: Addressing the challenges of Banditry and Kidnapping' (ICIR, 2021).

While there was a very important role for the military in resolving banditry in the North, the solution to banditry would not be achieved through the use of force... Dialogue is a legitimate tool used in all conflicts. It is used usually before a conflict, during the conflict, and after the conflict hostilities. It saves lives, properties and is more enduring than war." (ICIR, 2021).

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite efforts by both the Federal and State governments to bring this horrifying situation under control through the deployment of concerted measures, the killings and cruelty have taken on a new dimension as the bandits continue to devise new ways to carry out their heinous actions. Coercive engagements seem to have less impact, despite the huge resources being injected into the security budget, with the associated corruption in arm deals. The Military has been overstrained with numerous extended field engagements, with several tactical and operational modifications which yielded very minimal impact. Military onslaughts and indiscriminate aerial bombardments on Bandit's hideouts, with uncalculated collateral damages on captives and communities had culminated into reprisals on vulnerable civilians, killing, maiming, and raping hundreds in response to military attacks. This resulted in catastrophic human security issues, with huge displacements that created serious humanitarian crises.

1.3. Research Questions

The general question is whether a coercive approach to domestic uprisings is capable of addressing insecurity?

The specific questions are:

1. What are the factors that instigated an armed banditry by an ethnic-nationality group in the North-West Nigeria, which subsequently degenerated to be qualified as terrorism?

2. What impact has the military coercive approach made on domestic armed banditry/insurgency?
3. How has the approach contained upsurge of armed banditry/terrorism in the Northwest Nigeria?
4. What effect does armed banditry/terrorism and military coercive intervention has on human security in the North-West Nigeria?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the causal factors of the dreaded ethnic-nationality armed banditry/terrorist group, which degenerated into maiming, killing, raping, and kidnapping vulnerable civilian populations in the North-West Nigeria,
2. To determine the impact of military coercive operation on domestic armed banditry/terrorism in containing the upsurge and providing permanent solution in North-West Nigeria,
3. To determine the effect of armed banditry/terrorist group and military coercive operations on human security in the Northwest Nigeria.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to North-West of Nigeria (Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara states), dwelling on the security events from the aftermath of 2015 elections to date.

1.6. Methodology

A qualitative research method is adopted in this study, using secondary method of data collection and analysis, leveraging on desk review of existing literature: research papers/articles, e-journals, magazines and newspapers, online publications etc. Statistical data from research institutes, vulnerability and displacement data from humanitarian agencies are used in testing the hypothesis and analyzing the causal effects and interactions of the variables.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Literature Review

Banditry means occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime (Sunday, 2021). It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob rape or kill. Banditry is a crime against persons. It has been a common genre of crime and violence in contemporary societies (Adewuyi, 2021). The concept of banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. Although armed banditry in Nigeria is as ancient as the country itself, showing itself in cattle rustling, village raiding, and robbery, the crime has recently evolved into a sophisticated and well-organized criminal network, posing a serious security danger to the afflicted states (Sunday, 2021: Adewuyi, 2021).

Banditry could be conceptualized in varied ways, with a common indicator around the use of violence by sub-national criminal organizations to further their economic goals rather than a political or religious purpose. Banditry, in contrast to ideological groups that always have goals, is merely illegal activity that targets individuals and organizations for the purpose of accumulating riches. Killing, armed robbery, village raiding, ransom kidnapping, raping, livestock rustling, and other forms of armed violence such as illegal mining are all part of it (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014).

Another viewpoint is that banditry in the North-West region is carried out by a variety of other criminal syndicates who take advantage of the region's already precarious security situation to commit crimes for personal, economic, or political gain (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019; International Crises Group 2020). Those that turn to organized crime, such as armed banditry, do so as a desperate method of economic accumulation and socio-economic empowerment (Nadama, 2019).

In modern Nigeria, rural banditry linked to cattle rustling has become a serious human security concern. It involves the theft of cattle and animals from herders, as well as livestock raiding from ranches. It is increasingly an economically based form of criminality perpetuated by informal networks, despite being driven by various needs and factors (Kwaja, 2013). In the framework of subsistence and commercial pastoralism, rural banditry thrives as a form of 'primitive' cowherd accumulation. The upsetting of pastoralist transhumant activities is the most alarming result of this banditry. Furthermore, rape, kidnapping, coordinated attacks on towns and communities, and looting are all part of rural banditry (Adewuyi, 2021).

The banditry crisis contains elements of criminality, interethnic conflict, terrorism, and warlordism, and, what's more, the salience of these various dimensions changes over time and between individual actors. Many Nigerians, even those directly affected by the conflict, do not have a clear idea of who the "bandits" are and what they hope to achieve." (Barnett and Rufai, 2021)

According to Assessment Capacities Projects (ACAPS, 2020) report, for the past nine years, banditry organizations in Nigeria's North-West have grown in tactics and style of operations, murdering people at random, displacing populations, and damaging agricultural livelihoods of impacted villages. Due to climatic and biological changes in the area, particularly desertification, land and water became valuable commodities. Farmers/herder confrontations and warfare between armed nomadic Fulani herders and armed sedentary Hausa/Non-Hausa farmers have occurred in certain circumstances due to conflict over resources, notably cattle. On both sides, the emergence of illegal businesses quickly converted some of them into banditry gangs. Land and grazing rights are still unresolved legal concerns (ACAPS, 2020).

The existence and escalation of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria is simply a mishandled security issue that has been simmering for years. Criminal groups in general, as well as armed bandits in Northern Nigeria, have taken advantage of the problem of under-governed or ungoverned forestlands and poorly managed borders (Ojo, 2020). This has grown more apparent in recent years as the government has repeatedly exhibited an extreme inability to rule, fueling public perceptions that Nigeria is on the verge of becoming a failed state. North-West is vulnerable to armed banditry due to the prevalence of the informal sector, the development of criminal networks linked to international players, availability to sophisticated weaponry, and a lack of official presence (Ojo, 2020).

More so, human security connotes safeguarding aspects of a people's life, such as personal security, community security, political security, food security, health security, educational security, environmental security, and so on, according to the UNDP (1994). Two primary parts of human security give a "more precise definition": "safety against such chronic dangers as starvation, sickness, and repression," and "protection from unexpected and harmful disruptions in regular living patterns." The Report stressed that the two freedoms, "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want," (UNDP, 1994).

While it may appear simple to make the individual the object of security, the issue arises when contemplating the meaning of security. As a result, security concerns now exist in all aspects of life, and human security, predictably, covers seven distinct 'domains' of security: economic, food, health, the environment, personal, community, and political (Floyd, 2007).

In many parts of Nigeria, the situation resembles the Sahel region's governance vacuum. Religious extremist organizations and/or criminal elements have taken over distant locations where governmental presence is diminished or non-existent, creating a power vacuum that is sometimes filled by ungoverned zones. The point made by Mohammed Bello Tukur, Secretary General of Confederation of Traditional Herder Organizations in Africa (CORET), supports the theory that the high level of illegal activities perpetrated by criminal gangs and networks is due to a lack of state capacity to regulate and establish effective governance. Tukur claims that almost all the herds in the Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna State, where cattle rustling and related criminal operations have been focused, had been taken. In reality, the belt that runs from Birnin Gwari to Anchau, passing through Funtua, Faskari, and sections of Zamfara, is like a no-man's land (Tukur 2013: Adewuyi, 2021' Bello et al., 2021).

The Nigerian security forces have two main responses to violence: first, they strive to suppress it by using overwhelming force or violence, particularly if the violence threatens perceived interests or threatens the status quo. Whether diffusing protesters, retorting to separatist agitations, the Nigerian security forces have a strong desire to confront

force with force. This approach, however, is counterproductive, particularly in light of the country's current situation, which includes multiple armed conflicts across its various regions. In the face of violent conflicts caused by structural or grievance-based concerns such as armed banditry, insurgency, and so on, this method is largely impractical (Wodu, 2020). Second, when the first technique fails, quasi-dialogues are used instead, which do not admit or address the causes of the violence. This takes the shape of peace deals or settlements that make short-term advantages at the expense of long-term consequences. To prove this notion, look no farther than Nigeria's response to armed banditry (Barnett and Rufai, 2021).

Nigerian security services traditionally responded to the problem by expanding military and police deployment to volatile areas. 'Operations Puff Adder,' 'Diran Mikiya,' 'Sharan Daji,' 'Hadarin Daji,' 'Thunder Strike,' and 'Exercise Harbin Kunama III', were some of the tactical codes used for these deployments, with same strategic outlook and outcome. All of these actions have had mixed results: for example, while security forces have successfully repelled bandit attacks, demolished several hideouts, and killed or jailed hundreds of bandits, bandit-related homicides and kidnappings have continued in states like Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Niger (Wodu, 2020). The militarization of the government's approach has aggravated the banditry situation. The Nigerian military has launched anti-banditry missions in the Northwest on a regular basis since the commencement of Operation Harbin Kunama ("scorpion sting") in 2016. As bandits are forced to relocate and regroup, this typically results in brief periods of peace. Military activities, notwithstanding these transitory benefits, have fueled herder animosity and, as a result, helped bandit recruitment. Due to their lack of familiarity with the local community, military troops frequently obtain information from local officials or vigilantes, who often carry their own grudges and prejudices. Bandits frequently utilize villagers or herders as human shields when they evacuate their camps due to military pressure. Regardless of how cynical one may be, when government troops attack and cause collateral damage, it does it in a way that builds tension.

The decade-long fight with Boko Haram in the Northeast, deteriorating security in the Niger Delta, farmer-herder disputes in North-central and Southern Nigeria, and other forms of criminality across the country have all hampered the military response to escalating insecurity in the region. In fact, the Nigerian military is on active tactical operation in more than 30 states across the country, dealing with internal security issues that would normally be dealt with by the police (Ojewale, 2021). Terrorist groups have been able to operate with little resistance in the Northwest due to security forces being strained. Furthermore, given the federal government's waning commitment, terrorists and criminals appear to be emboldened.

If we count our losses, we will know that something is wrong with our approach and there is the need to change our approach.” (Abubakar, 2021)

With ongoing security difficulties and the government's failure to guarantee safety and security in the country, the question that everyone in Nigeria is asking today is "can there be security?" Is it possible to ensure the safety of people and property? Others have argued that the situation has a political undertone or inclination calculated to serve the interests of certain political groups who have been dissatisfied and disgruntled with the country's political manifestations. Government at all levels has not done enough by not confronting the situation head-on and dealing with it decisively (Nigeria South Africa Chamber of Commerce, 2021).

Human security is the stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance of knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in one's community or neighborhood and by people around. It focuses on the emotional and psychological sense of belonging to a social group that can offer one protection). It is generally argued however that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise” (NSACC, 2021).

More than ten million children currently not attending school, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. In northern Nigeria, only 53% of primary-school-age children receive a formal education. The livelihoods of nearly 21 million people in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, and Zamfara have been jeopardized by criminal groups (ACAPS, 2021).

2.2. Theoretical Understanding

Securitization is defined as the intersubjective and socially constructed process of recognizing and valuing a threat to a specific referent object. Securitization is further seen as the intersubjective fabrication of an existential threat that necessitates immediate an urgent attention, as well as the employment of extreme means to fight this threat (Buzan et al., 1998).

According to securitization theorist e.g. (Buzan, 1998) security threats are a form of political issue that has been moved from normal politics (where all the usual laws, regulations, and norms apply) to security politics (where normal laws and rules can be ignored/broken). Securitisation is the term for this shift into the security realm, which is accomplished by a certain type of 'speech act.' To use the theory's terminology, a securitising maneuver is an intersubjective social event in which a security actor must

persuade a relevant audience that some referent object faces an existential threat (Renzulli, 2017).

Munster Reins Van (2020) advanced an argument that “Securitization” was principally connected with the Copenhagen school of security studies, which includes Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, and a number of other experts. According to Munster, concept of securitization, offered a new perspective on the increasingly wearisome debate between those who claimed that threats are objective (Munster, 2020). The main tenets of “Securitization Thesis” are: (1) assert that a referent object is existentially threatened, (2) demands the right to take extreme countermeasures to address the threat, and (3) persuades an audience that breaking rules to address the threat is permissible. Thus, when anything is labeled "security," it is emphasized as a top-priority concern. Securitization can thus be defined as the process by which subjects are raised to top priority security concerns that require immediate attention, thereby justifying the avoidance of public debate and democratic norms (Buzan, Wilde, and Waever, 1998: Politicon, 2018).

The Copenhagen School's securitization method has an emancipatory goal, as the preceding discussion has demonstrated. From a securitization standpoint, it appears that the Copenhagen School researchers are "pushed into the position of securitizers" by "objectifying sectors" and securitize topics in the same way that politicians do (Diskaya, 2013).

The second theory adopted for this study is Human Security Theory: As indicated in General Assembly resolution 66/290, “human security is a strategy to assist Member States in detecting and addressing prevalent and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” It calls for “people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.” threatened. Human security is also based on a multi-sectoral understanding of insecurities. Therefore, human security entails a broadened understanding of threats and includes causes of insecurity relating for instance to economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (UNTFHS, NY: Tanaka, 2015: Baysoy, 2018).

First, human security is required in response to the interconnectedness and complexity of both old and new security threats, ranging from chronic and persistent poverty to ethnic violence, human trafficking, climate change, health pandemics, international terrorism, and sudden economic and financial downturns. Such dangers frequently take on global dimensions, moving beyond traditional security concepts that focus solely on external military aggressions.

Second, human security requires a comprehensive approach that takes advantage of a wide range of new options to address such challenges holistically. Conventional techniques alone will not be sufficient to address human security issues. Rather, they call for a new consensus that recognizes the

interconnections and interdependencies between development, human rights, and national security.

It is conceived as:

...to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.”(UNOCHA, 2009)

Security, rights, and growth are all 'human components' of human security. As a result, it is a cross-disciplinary notion with the following characteristics:

- i. Prevention-oriented
- ii. People-centered
- iii. Multi-sectoral
- iv. Comprehensive
- v. Context-specific

Human security is a people-centered concept that puts the individual at the "center of analysis." As a result, it evaluates a wide range of conditions that threaten survival, livelihood, and dignity, and determines the point at which human life is no longer tolerable. A multi-sectoral knowledge of insecurities is also required for human security. As a result, human security necessitates a broader awareness of threats, which covers factors such as economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political instability (UNTFHS, NY: Tanaka, 2015; Baysoy, 2018). The human security strategy aims to create a cooperative, peaceful, and stable environment for the advancement of human rights and overall national security. It focuses on improving the existential conditions of a state's citizens by preventing or combating risks to the citizenry's safety, well-being, and survival, as well as ensuring the state's corporate existence.

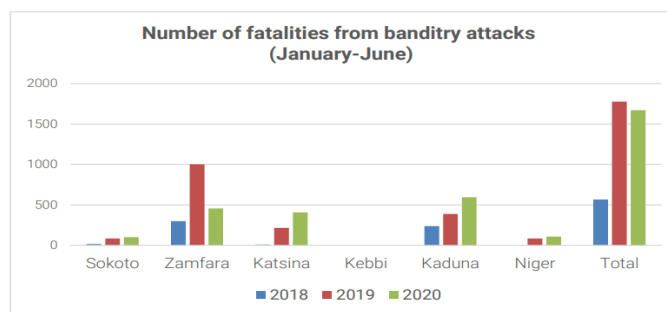
III. EFFECTS AND CHALLENGES OF ARMED BANDITRY AND MILITARY OPERATIONS ON HUMAN SECURITY IN THE NORTH-WEST NIGERIA

There is no denying that banditry constitutes a severe threat not just to the security of North-West states, but also to the country as a whole, given its growing repercussions and implications. The extent to which armed bandits operate in the Northwest region requires attention from both the state and federal governments, particularly since the latter controls state security institutions. This complex scenario of social violence and insecurity in the afflicted countries has been going on for nearly a decade (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018). The escalating attacks of bandit groups have resulted in the loss of lives and property, the eviction of people from their homes, and an increase in the number of widows, widowers, and orphans who now live in Internally Displaced Persons camps (Olapeju and Peter, 2021).

The geology and climatic circumstances of the region present significant challenges to Federal and State governments. Much of the Northwest is savannah, although large forests, some of which are home to tens of thousands of primarily Fulani herders (also known as pastoralists). These forests, which were once under the watchful eye of forestry authorities, gradually evolved into sanctuaries for criminals such as livestock rustlers, highway robbers, kidnappers, and cannabis farmers. Locals in Kaduna state now call the Kamuku forest "Sambisa," implying that it has become as hazardous as the Borno state forests, where Boko Haram has built a stronghold. The region also shares roughly two-thirds of Nigeria's 1,497-kilometer international border with the unregulated Niger Republic (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Africa Centre for Strategic Studies publication on North-West Nigeria's complicated banditry titled "Nigeria's Diverse Security Threats" March 2021 revealed that criminal gangs in Northwest Nigeria have been behind a wave of kidnappings for ransom targeting boarding schools, taking advantage of a security vacuum (Africa Center, 2021). In Nigeria, the Northwest has had the highest number of kidnappings in the last five years. The ransoms obtained as a result of these mass kidnappings have turned into a source of revenue for these criminal groups. Mass kidnappings in Zamfara, Niger, and Katsina states have echoed Boko Haram's historic Chibok schoolgirl kidnapping in 2014, forcing the government to strike back. Officials from the government deny paying a ransom to secure the children's release, although on-the-ground reports contradict that (Africa Center, 2021). Rival gangs raid and brawl over the artisanal gold mines that have flourished in Zamfara State, where the North West's violent gang problem began. Because of the gangs' influence over the state's gold rush, many underprivileged and jobless young men have joined their ranks. These gangs are known to hide out in the Zamfara jungles of Sububu and Dansadau and transport weaponry across the border from Niger Republic. The government of Zamfara estimates that 10,000 so-called bandits are dispersed among the state's 40 camps (Africa Center, 2021).

Fig. 1 Number of Fatalities from Banditry in Northwest Nigeria (2018 – 2020)



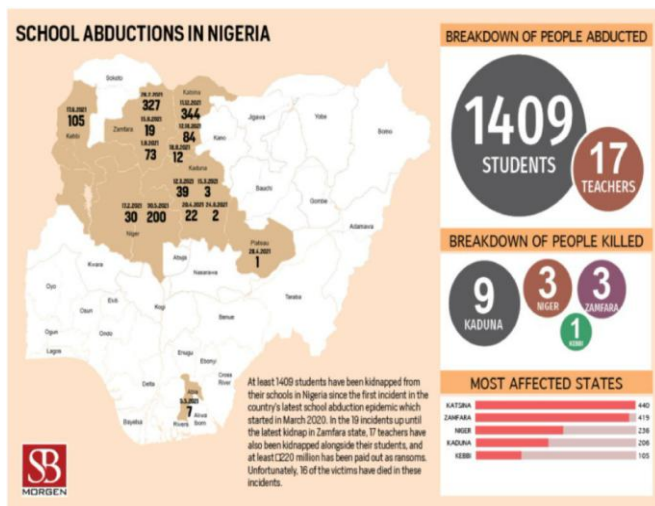
Sources: Council on Foreign Relations 07/2020; Chart: ACAPS

ACAPS (2020)

The problem of armed banditry in the Northwest is exacerbated by the spread of small guns and light weapons as a result of conflict, particularly in the African Sahel region, due to the failure of disarmament plans to be implemented properly. Targeted groups frequently just cross porous boundaries, obtaining new identities in the process. Poor communication, a lack of social amenities such as good roads, appropriate power, and health facilities, as well as poverty, exacerbate the problem, making it an ideal environment for rustling, smuggling, and small arms trade (Abdulyakeen, 2021).

Assessment Capacities Project statistics for September – December 2021 shows the dynamic trend of criminality and increasing fatalities and displacement. Between September and November there were 35 incidents of violence involving attacks by armed gunmen and abductions and 229 fatalities, compared with 5 incidents and fatalities in the comparable period of 2020. On 8/12/21 about 11,500 people, mostly women and children, fled villages in Sabon Birni LGA (Sokoto State, Nigeria) to Tahoua region (Niger) following three days of attacks in mid-November that including killing, looting, and destruction of crops. The violence in Northwest Nigeria has resulted in an estimated 80,000 refugees crossing the border into the Maradi region, Niger, since 2019. Between March 2020–June 2021, over 1,400 students and staff have been kidnapped in several school abductions reported in northwest Nigeria. These abductions took place in Kankara and Mahuta (Katsina state), Kagara and Tgina (Niger state), Jangebe and Maradun (Zamfara state), Mando, Afaka, and Kasarami (Kaduna state), and Birnin Yauri (Kebbi state) (ACAPS, 2021).

Fig. 2 School Abductions in Northwest Nigeria



SBM Intelligence (2021)

Children have also suffered greatly as a result of the violence. Over 16,000 children have been orphaned in Zamfara state as a result of violence in the previous decade, according to the administration. Some political officials in the state have raised their estimates, with one placing the figure as high as 44,000.

As a result of the violence disrupting schools in many locations, the already high number of out-of-school children in the region has increased, as has the number of juvenile street beggars in numerous towns and cities (International Crisis Group, 2020).

In many parts of northwestern Nigeria, the violence has wreaked havoc on the economy. Agriculture, which employs over 80% of the population, has been particularly heavily damaged. For years, farmers in the impacted areas have been leaving their crops for fear of being attacked or kidnapped. Over 13,000 hectares of farmland have been destroyed or rendered inaccessible in Zamfara state as a result of attacks by herder-allied armed groups and criminal gangs (International Crisis Group, 2020). While of October 2019, the State Emergency Management Agency reports that 21,316 hectares of farmland remained uncultivated across five local government areas in Sokoto state, as 80,000 scared farmers stayed away (Daily Trust, 2019: Ladan and Matawalli, 2020). Similarly, a large number of animals perished.

Internal displacement of residents in the Northwest is one of the most visible results of armed banditry. Between January and August 2019, more than 200,000 people were internally displaced in several villages across Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto states, according to a 2019 report produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nigerian government. Women, children, and the elderly made up the majority of the IDPs that sought sanctuary in neighboring Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. Banditry has left an estimated 22,000 widows and 44,000 orphans in Zamfara State, according to reports from the Zamfara State Government (Abdulyakeen, 2021).

In Zamfara state, for example, about 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were rustled between 2011 and 2019. These upheavals have impoverished farmers and herders alike in certain areas, resulting in food shortages and exacerbating hunger, particularly among youngsters. Governor Abubakar Bello of Niger said in April 2020, "We are on the verge of famine and starvation." (2020 Leadership)

Bandit reprisal attack on 9th January 2022 has claimed the lives of over 200, though government official's figures indicated that 58 people were killed in villages in the Northwestern Nigerian state of Zamfara during violent reprisal attacks by armed bandits following military raids on their hideouts this week (CNN, 2022)

IV. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

Finally, if the threats of hunger, diseases, poverty, acute youth unemployment and underemployment, bad governance, political and economic exclusion, and a lack of social amenities are not addressed, fortifying the security walls with the latest security equipment/gadgets, as well as assigning security professionals to secure the populace, will amount to nothing in Nigeria. To ensure democratic stability and overall

national security, the government should step up efforts at all levels to address the sources of security concerns like as hunger, diseases, poverty, acute young unemployment, political and economic exclusion, and human rights violations.

4.2. Policy Recommendations

1. Civil-military collaboration is essential, as is infrastructure development, access to communication, and police presence and protection, especially for rural populations. Not only that, but the vigilantes formed in various communities in the North to combat the activities of these bandits must be professionally trained and well organized by the government in order to function more effectively and aid their communities. Small arms and light ammunitions must be checked across porous borders in collaboration with other countries in the region, but eventually, poverty must be severely decreased, and providing adequate education to all residents must become a government priority.
2. Ending the violence in Nigeria's Northwest demands a multi-pronged strategy, some of which must be long-term in nature. The top aim is to urge herders and farmers to reach negotiated agreements, as well as to disarm, rehabilitate, and reintegrate members of their affiliated armed groups. In support of this effort, the federal and state governments should prioritize restructuring livestock production systems in a way that meets the requirements of both herders and farmers while reducing friction. To halt the flow of jihadists and weapons into the North West, Abuja should engage with Niamey to boost border security and strengthen its forestry departments to govern the woodlands where armed groups camp.
3. It should also properly regulate the region's potentially profitable gold business, while collaborating with foreign partners to address urgent humanitarian needs and doing everything possible to mitigate the region's climate change effects.
4. Because the Nigerian state defines peace as the absence of overt violence and hostilities, armed banditry in the North-West will continue to thrive. It refuses to understand people's suffering and structural disparities as not only a kind of violence, but also a key motivator of violent conflict. To combat banditry, Nigerian security services must abandon their long-standing strategy of battling with more force and instead focus on creating trust with populations vulnerable to bandit attacks. Working with vigilantes and community leaders on the ground, they should put up early warning and reaction systems.
5. Controlling the flow, illicit trafficking, circulation, and usage of small guns and light weapons should be a priority for the military. This should go beyond simply handing over weaponry as part of a peace agreement to really policing the borders to stop the

flow of SALWs across Nigeria's numerous porous borders

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