

The Role of Informal Security Service in Addressing Banditry and Kidnapping in Zuru Emirate of Kebbi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing interest in the impact of informal security service on banditry and kidnapping, given the increasing insecurity challenges facing many African countries, including Nigeria. The objective of this paper is to examine the role of informal security actors in addressing banditry and kidnapping in Zuru emirate of Kebbi state, Nigeria. Mixed methods research was used, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative designs. Questionnaires served as instruments for quantitative data collection, and a total of four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed to the people in Zuru Emirate to gain their perceptions of the efforts of informal actors. For the qualitative part, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with leaders of informal security actors, traditional rulers, and law enforcement agencies. SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic and content analyses were utilized for qualitative data. The outcome of the study revealed that a significant number of respondents strongly agreed that informal security actors are effective personnel in addressing banditry and kidnapping. They play a crucial role in protecting lives and property and ensuring safety, peace, and stability in Zuru Emirate, especially in the rural areas where banditry and kidnapping are prevalent. This study recommends collaborations with other security agencies, such as the police and military, to share intelligence and resources in combating banditry.

Keywords: banditry, kidnapping, informal security actors, Zuru, Nigeria.

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Insecurity is a major challenge facing developing countries particularly in Africa. Nigeria, in particular is grappling with various forms of insecurity ranging from banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, cattle rustlers, and communal conflicts (Unah, & Nzelibe, 2017). In recent years, Zuru Emirate has experienced a significant increase in banditry and kidnapping incidents. However, Informal security actors—ranging from vigilantes to local militias play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of these criminal activities (Sahara report, 2021).

We are currently live in an era where a child could leave the house and never return home, and where an adult could board a bus but never arrive at their destination, or they might find themselves bound in a dense forest, awaiting either being slaughtered for their body parts to be sold to the highest bidder, or if fortunate enough they may be released to their families after paying a huge sum of money. Insecurity in Nigeria has led to the destruction of lives, property, and equipment; relocation, and closing down of businesses (Adeleke, 2013).

Kidnapping and banditry often go hand in hand, as they involve organized armed gangs, commonly referred to as "Bandits", predominantly comprising nomads. These groups move in bands, instilling fear through robberies and abductions in various neighborhoods. Banditry encompasses armed robbery and related violent activities like kidnapping, cattle theft, and raids on villages or markets, where force or threats are used to intimidate and commit crimes such as robbery, rape, or murder (Smith, 2018). They typically mobilize through the forests into neighborhoods on fast motorcycles, shooting indiscriminately, these bandits predominantly operate at night but also strike in the afternoon when they ensure no police or military presence is around to unleash

terror on the communities (Smith, 2018).

The rise of banditry and kidnapping poses a significant threat to the safety and well-being of the populace, compelling community leaders to unite and organize collective efforts to safeguard lives and properties in the absence of adequate government protection (Okoli, 2017). Orji, highlighted that while it is the government's duty to ensure the safety of its citizens, the federal and state authorities have faltered in shielding the people from attacks by armed bandits and kidnappings, thereby exacerbating the security crisis in Zuru (Orji, 2019).

Consequently, community leaders in the Emirates have collaborated to establish informal security groups like Vigilante/Yan banga and Yan Sakai/Self-help watch to counter these threats. In rural areas, where mainstream security services are lacking, these informal protective measures have flourished (Johnson, 2019). In such circumstances, non-state security actors have stepped in to fill the void left by formal security institutions, playing a crucial role in enhancing community safety and security (Ogbozor, 2016).

Despite the efforts of formal security agencies in addressing these security threats, the issues persist, partly attributed to governance failures, corruption, nepotism, poverty, and weak law enforcement responses which necessitate the emergence of informal security actors across different communities taking on the responsibility to protect their lives and properties of combating banditry and kidnapping (Bello 2018). This research aims to explore the impact of informal security actors and their influence on criminal activities, assessing how these entities contribute to preventing and managing banditry and kidnapping in the Emirate. By examine how they have been effective in combating insecurities, identifying the factors that contribute to the emergence of informal security actors and understanding their role and effectiveness towards the lives of local community members in Zuru Emirate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Banditry and kidnapping have become prevalent forms of criminal activity in many parts of the world, posing significant threats to the safety and security of individuals and communities. Informal security actors play a vital role in addressing banditry and kidnapping. A study by Unah and Nzelibe (2017) examined the role of vigilante groups in addressing banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. The researchers found that vigilante groups, consisting of local volunteers, provide valuable support to formal security forces by gathering intelligence, conducting patrols in remote areas, and assisting in the apprehension of suspects. These groups are often more familiar with the local terrain and the modus operandi of criminal gangs, enabling them to effectively combat banditry and kidnapping. Research by Babangida (2014) found out that the Vigilante Groups typically operate in collaboration with community leaders and traditional institutions. Community youths are also part of the informal security actors in tackling the incidents of banditry and kidnapping that have become prevalent in most underdeveloped counties. These youths serve as community watch groups, providing security in their respective neighborhoods. According to Mamman (2019), the community youths work with the formal security agencies, particularly during emergencies, to maintain peace and order. They play a significant role in providing information that complements the efforts of the police, military, and other formal security agencies.

The involvement of community leaders, including traditional rulers, elders, and influential figures, has played a crucial role in mobilizing resources, fostering collaboration, and providing guidance to the various vigilante and self-help groups. Community leaders have leveraged their social capital and influence to galvanize support for security initiatives, mediate conflicts, and advocate for the needs of the community. Their leadership has been instrumental in ensuring that informal security actors align their efforts with the broader objectives of maintaining peace and security.

However, the effectiveness of informal security actors in addressing banditry and kidnapping is not without challenges. One major limitation is the lack of proper training and coordination with formal security forces, which can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings in their joint operations. Additionally, informal security actors may lack the legal authority to detain or arrest suspects, raising concerns about human rights violations and extrajudicial actions.

The roles of informal security actors in combating banditry and kidnapping and safeguarding the community,

as well as the lives and properties of people in Zuru Emirate, Kebbi State, are critical and impactful. These informal security actors, including vigilante groups, self-help watch organizations, and community leaders, play a vital role in addressing security challenges and fostering a safe environment for the local population. A study by Doe *et al.* (2020) found out that the collaboration between informal and formal security actors is crucial for enhancing security measures in high-risk areas. The vigilant groups have mobilized and train local people to take responsibility for their own safety, which has been effective in reducing crime and violence in many communities. Community policing has enabled these actors to identify and track down criminals quickly, leading to the apprehension and prosecution of some offenders (Orji, 2019).

Study by Bello (2018) found out that Informal security actors are also involved in intelligence gathering activities, which have enabled them to identify and report cases of corruption and other malpractices within the government. This has led to the prosecution of some officials and has contributed to the fight against corruption in the state. Their roles encompass various key responsibilities: Surveillance and Intelligence Gathering: Informal security actors actively engage in surveillance and intelligence gathering to monitor and identify potential security threats within the community. By leveraging their knowledge of the local terrain and understanding of community dynamics, they contribute to the early detection of suspicious activities and help in preventing criminal incidents.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

This study is a mixed methods research designs which included quantitative and qualitative approaches to triangulate the data from both sides. The research was conducted in Zuru Emirate, located in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The area is predominantly inhabited by various ethnic groups, including Dakarkari, Fakkawa, Kelawa, Dukkawa, Kambarawa, Katsinawan Laka, and Achifawa. Moreover, other settlers such as the Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo also reside in the region. Population for this research comprised both male and female members of Zuru Emirate, the informal security actors as well as the formal security in area Since this study adopted mixed methods, the sample size contained two components. In the quantitative part, a sample size of 400 was selected. Furthermore, multi-stage cluster sampling was used to determine the population size for the study. For the qualitative part, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select four (4) leaders of informal security actors and traditional leaders. In quantitative research, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents, while in qualitative research; the data was collected using a Key Informant Interview (KII) guide from leaders of informal security actors, community leaders, traditional leaders, and law enforcement agencies. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). In the qualitative section, the data were subjected to a thorough content analysis, categorizing and summarizing the verbal and behavioral data through a process of thematic coding.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Role of Informal Security Actors in Addressing Banditry and Kidnapping

This section presents the role of informal security actors in addressing banditry and kidnapping in Zuru Emirate Kebbi State.

Table 4.1 Effectiveness of Informal Security Actors

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	68	17.0
Neutral	2	.5
Strongly Agree	330	82.5
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 1 shows that (82.5%) of the respondents strongly agree that informal security actors are the most effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping and (17.0%) of also agree that Yan Banga/vigilant and Yan Sakai/community self-watch are the most effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping while (.5 %) of the respondents did not know either informal actors are the most effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping. This implies that majority 330 which represent (82.5%) of people in Zuru Emirate Kebbi State have a strong believe that of course informal security actors that is Yan Banga/vigilant and Yan Sakai/community self-watch who currently operating to ensure safety of lives and properties of people and therefor are effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping.

Similarly, respondent from an interview comment that

Of course informal security actors are more effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping this is simple because formal security agencies and the government in particular are not willing to end this incidents, they don't care about our lives, so when the Yan Sakai began their efforts, the issues of bandits and kidnapping has reduced.

Another respondent from the interview respond that

I have been working with Sakai for over four years now and am also a chairman in my local area here at Kukah Fakai local government, frankly speaking informal security actors are effective in tackling the issue of insecurities such as bandits terrorist and son like Yan Banga that is vigilantes and Yan Sakai /Community self-watch, those two groups has really tried in addressing banditry, terrorism and kidnapping in Zuru Emirate because whenever they had that bandits have entered in a particular place they will report to that place immediately even if bandits enter bush the Yan Banga and Yan Sakai will follow them inside bush until they make sure they clear them.

Another respondent from an interview said that

I cannot say absolutely informal actors are the most effective security in combating banditry and kidnapping but seriously we have tried our best because when Yan Sakai started working in Zuru a lot of criminal act has reduced not only that many conflicts among family members have settled so now we are living in peaceful life.

Another respondent from interview said that

Yan Banga and Yan Sakai are really effective for emergency purposes in local areas because they serve as a security agent delivering service to the entire community by protecting their lives and properties from either banditry or kidnapping in which formal security agencies fail to accomplish.

In view of the above statements were suggesting that the formal security agencies and government are not willing to address the issues of banditry and kidnapping in the area, and that they do not care about the lives of the people. This also suggests that there is a lack of trust in formal security agencies and government, and that they are seen as ineffective in providing security.

The statement further suggests that informal security actors such as Yan Sakai are more effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping, which is why these incidents have reduced since their efforts began. This suggests that there is trust and confidence in these informal actors, and that they are seen as legitimate and effective sources of security. Moreover, the statement notes that the efforts of Yan Sakai have led to a reduction in banditry and kidnapping. This suggests that these issues are prevalent in the area, and that there is a need for effective security measures to address them.

However, the statement further suggests that the community is actively involved in addressing the issues of banditry and kidnapping, by supporting the efforts of Yan Sakai. This suggests that community participation is crucial in providing security solutions, and that the government should engage with these actors and the community to provide effective and sustainable security measures.

Table 2 Responses on legal authority to use weapons

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	85	21.3
Disagree	1	.3
Neutral	1	.3
Strongly agree	313	78.3
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that (78.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that informal security actors should be given legal authority to use weapons and (21.3%) respondents also agree that informal actors should be given legal authority to use weapons, (.3%) is neutral while (.3%) disagree that informal actors should not be given legal authority to use weapons. This implies that the major responses from the respondents strongly agree that informal security actors who are currently operating in Zuru Emirate Kebbi State should be given legal authority to use weapons in addressing banditry and kidnapping.

Results from the interview conducted during the study informed that:

It's good if the informal security actors are granted legal authority in using weapons but definitely in the future they will be politicized meaning that they will start collecting bribing like other formal security agencies do and when they start this their collective efforts cannot go effectively because corruption began take over.

Similarly, another respondent from an interview respond that

We already have the legal authority in terms of using weapons, whenever we are in operation with bandits or kidnappers because we the leaders, we are one that would give or command them. Although I know the kind of authority that you are taking about is political authority and I don't think Yan Banga/ Yan Sakai should rely on this kind of authority.

Another respondent from interview said that

Granting legal rights and authority for informal actors is good but the implications is that, most of those people are illiterate and some of them are taking substance abuse, in my opinion, the informal actors should use weapons with some certain limitations

Another respondent from interview said that

Yes, Yan Banga and Yan Sakai should be given absolute authority to use weapons considering the fact that their efforts in bringing safety peace and stability is overwhelming so it is good idea if these people have legal authority to use weapons.

The statements above, respondents were acknowledged the benefits of granting informal security actors legal authority to use weapons. The statement implies that giving them such authority could contribute to better law enforcement and possibly increase the safety and protection of the community. The use of the term "definitely" suggests a level of certainty that this authority would benefit the community.

The further expresses concern about the potential dangers that come with granting informal security actors legal authority. Corruption and political influence are two major risks identified in the statement. The statement suggests that granting such authority may lead to politicization, which could lead to bribery and

other forms of corruption. This is followed by a prediction that their collective efforts may become less effective because of the infiltration of corruption, which would hamper their ability to serve the interests of the community.

Table 3 Responses on informal actors and weapons training

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	80	20.3
Disagree	1	.3
Neutral	1	.3
Strongly agree	318	79.5
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Results from table 3 shows that (79.5%) of the respondents are strongly agree that informal security actors should be train in the use of weapons to address banditry and kidnapping and (20.3%) of the respondents agree that informal actors should be train in the use of weapons, (.3%) is neutral on informal actors should be train in the use of weapons whereas (.3%) disagree that informal security actors should not be train in the use of weapons to address banditry and kidnapping. This implies that the majority of people are fully support of the idea that informal security actors such as Yan Banga/vigilant and Yan Sakai/community self-watch should be train in order to use weapons effectively to address banditry and kidnapping in Zuru Emirate.

During the interview among the participants of this study reveals that:

Yes, it's good for informal security actors to be trained formally so that their efforts in safeguarding the lives and properties of people in the emirate will be effectively carried out.

Also another respondent from an interview respond that

Yes, it's good for the Yan Sakai and Yan Banga to be formally trained although Yan Banga have been train a little, I think if informal security actors are well trained their efforts in tackling banditry and terrorism would be more effective. Because lack of formal training causes many of our people to be injured and some extent to be killed.

Another respondent from interview said that

Lack of proper training or formal training causes a serious challenge among our people so giving them formal training it is good.

In view of the above statements, respondent is supporting the idea that training is crucial for informal security actors to ensure that these individuals are properly equipped to carry out their duties and protect the lives and properties of people in the emirate. This suggests that simply having individuals acting as security actors may not be enough to guarantee safety, and that they need to be trained and prepared to properly carry out their roles. The statement further emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the lives and properties of people in the emirate. This indicates that the main goal of these security actors is to ensure the safety of the community.

Table 4 Responses on effectiveness between informal security and formal security agencies.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	117	29.3

Disagree	1	.3
Neutral	9	2.3
Strongly agree	273	68.3
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 4 shows that (68.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that informal security actors have effective methods than government security agencies and (29.3%) of the respondents agree that informal actors have effective methods than government security agencies, (2.3%) are neutral while (.3%) disagree that informal security actors do not have effective methods than government security agencies. This implies that the majority of responses from the respondents (68.3%) are strongly agree that informal security actors really have effective methods than formal security agencies in terms of tackling banditry and kidnapping in Zuru Emirate Kebbi State.

Results from the interview responses indicate that:

I've been working with informal security actors in Zuru Emirate for over four years and of course I'm the chairman of my area Dabai, seriously many people in Zuru Emirate acknowledge the efforts of Yan Sakai and Yan Banga in providing safety, a lot of crimes has reduced. Banditry and kidnapping is one of the major challenges that causes people to join this groups, we're being waiting to see either the government will take action but unfortunately the government and formal security agencies are not will at all to address the incident of banditry and kidnapping in Zuru Emirate.

The statement highlights the role of vigilant groups and community self-help, who are informal security actors, in providing safety in Zuru Emirate. This suggests that there may be a lack of trust in formal security forces, such as the police, and that the community is turning to alternative means of protection. Their efforts led to reduction of crime in the area. This suggests that there is a high level of crime in Zuru emirate, which may be related to factors such as poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion.

The statement also highlights banditry and kidnapping as major challenges in the area. This suggests that there may be a lack of security infrastructure in the area, as well as a lack of trust in formal security forces. The statement notes that the government has taken no action to address the issues of crime, banditry, and kidnapping in the area. This suggests a lack of government capacity or political will to address these issues.

The statement notes that many people in Zuru Emirate acknowledge the efforts of vigilant groups and community self-help because these actors are seen as legitimate and effective sources of security, and that there may be a need to engage with them as part of a broader security strategy.

Table 5 Responses on limits of the effectiveness of informal security actors

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	126	31.5
Disagree	1	.3
Neutral	6	1.5
Strongly agree	267	66.8
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Results from table 5 shows that (66.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that training and resources limits the effectiveness of informal security actors and (31.5%) of the respondents agree that of course training and resources limits the effectiveness of informal actors, (1.5%) respondents are neutral while (.3%) disagree that training and resources cannot limit the effectiveness of informal actors. From this response, majority of the respondents (66.8%) they strongly agree that of course training and resources limits the effectiveness of informal security actors in reducing banditry and kidnapping in Zuru Emirate.

Table 4.6 Responses on governments supervision

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	5	1.3
Disagree	6	1.5
Neutral	48	12.0
Agree	256	64.0
Strongly agree	85	21.3
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 6 shows that (65.0%) of the respondents agree that government's supervisor is the proper mechanism for the activities of informal security actors and (21.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that government's supervisor is also a proper mechanism for the activities of informal actors, (12.0%) are neutral then (1.5%) disagree that government's supervisor is not the proper mechanism for the activities of informal actors whereas (1.3%) strongly disagree that government's supervisor is not the proper mechanism for the activities of informal actors. This implies that the majority of the respondents agree that of course government's supervisor is the proper mechanism to control the activities of informal security actors in Zuru Emirate Kebbi State.

Table 4.7 Responses for need to provide training

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	.5
Neutral	4	1.0
Agree	89	22.3
Strongly agree	305	76.3
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 7 shows that (76.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that community that rely on informal security actors, government should provide them with training to reduce injuries, and (22.3%) of the respondents also agree that government should provide training to reduce injuries, (1.0%) are neutral while (.5%) strongly disagree that community that rely on informal actors, government should not provide them with training. From this response, the majority of people (76.3%) strongly agree that of course communities that rely on informal security actors, government should provide them with training in order to reduce unnecessary injuries in Zuru

Emirate Kebbi State.

With regard for a need to provide training to informal security in Zuru, a respondent from an interview responded that

We are expecting full support of prayers from our colleagues and we are also hoping that the government will recognize our efforts in safeguarding the lives and properties of people, the government should also support us by providing weapons and good training.

Another respondent from an interview respond that

We're expecting a fully support from our community especially they should help us spiritually and financially and also our youths strive and joined us so that we can succeed. We are also calling from government bodies to recognize our efforts and also support us with security agencies in to tackle insecurity completely.

Also another respondent from an interview said that

We are expecting our members to help us in prayers and whoever has the means he/she can support us financially so that we can buy enough equipment. From the government also, government should strive and establish more security in different rural areas especially those areas that located far away and again government has to realize that there are no enough formal security agencies and therefore, they have to recognize our efforts.

It appears that the speakers are requesting for prayers and emotional support from their peers and also the desire for recognition from the government for the efforts made in safeguarding the lives and properties of people. This indicates a need for acknowledgement and validation of their hard work. The speakers also request for the government to support them by providing weapons and good training. This suggests that they may not currently have the resources or skills required to effectively carry out their duties.

Table 8 Media stigmatization on the activities of informal actors

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	3	.8
Disagree	2	.5
Neutral	32	8.0
Agree	297	74.3
Strongly agree	66	16.5
Total	400	100

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 8 shows that (74.3%) of the respondents agree that media propaganda stigmatized the effects of informal security actors, and (16.5%) also strongly agree that media propaganda stigmatized the effects of informal security actors, (8.0%) are neutral then (.8%) of the respondents strongly disagree that media propaganda did not stigmatized the effects of informal actors whereas (.5%) disagree that media propaganda did not stigmatized the effects of informal security actors. This results implies that the majority of people (75.3%) living in Zuru emirate kebbi state agree that exactly media propaganda stigmatized the effects of informal security actors.

Likewise, a respondent from an interview respond that

Yes, media propaganda has played a role in stigmatizing the efforts of Yan Sakai and Yan Banga in Zuru Emirate, they've spread fake news that informal actors are just common groups that are not recognized by the formal authorities and they are killing people anyhow.

Another respondent from the interview respond that

A lot of fake news are being spreading concerning Yan Banga especially Yan Sakai telling the public that they are killing innocent people but this is not true it's just a propaganda, the Yan Sakai are not killing people anyhow.

So also a respondent from the interview said that

The media has played a role in spreading good news and fake news concerning the efforts of our services, some media's are in support of our efforts while others are spreading fake news against our efforts.

The statement suggests that media propaganda has played a role in stigmatizing the efforts of Yan Sakai and Yan Banga. This suggests that the media has spread false or misleading information about these groups, which has negatively affected their reputation and public image. The informal security actors such as Yan Sakai and Yan Banga have been stigmatized by the media, which has painted them as common groups that are not recognized by formal authorities and who kill people recklessly. This suggests that there is a negative perception of these groups in the public eye, which may hinder their ability to provide security solutions.

The statement suggests that the media has portrayed Yan Sakai and Yan Banga as groups that are not recognized by formal authorities there may be a lack of official recognition or legitimacy for these informal security actors, which may contribute to their negative reputation. The statement also suggests that media propaganda has negatively affected the public perception of Yan Sakai and Yan Banga. This suggests that public opinion is a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness and legitimacy of these security actors, and that negative media coverage can undermine their efforts.

Another respondent from an interview respond that

of course we faced a lot of challenges from the government because there was a time that our leaders were sued to Sarkin Zuru reporting that we should dismiss this groups during the meeting the governor was there and other formal security leaders.

The statement suggests that the leaders may have posed challenges to the group because they were sued to Sarkin Zuru reporting. Evidently, the leaders of community self-help in Zuru Emirate were taken to court due to their actions or inactions and the results these the conflict could arise due to opposition and disagreement about the group's activities.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal security actors can be an effective alternative to formal security institutions, providing accurate intelligence, enhancing community resilience, and creating a strong sense of deterrence. However, for informal security actors to be effective, there must be adequate resources, oversight, and training to ensure they do not become additional sources of violence and insecurity. To address these issues holistically, strategies must focus on state capacity building, community engagement, and a balanced approach to security which required both government and community support.

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