

Assessment of Rural Banditry and Socio-Economic Implication in Niger State: A Focus on Shiroro Local Government Area Niger State, 2015-2021

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ABSTRACT

Banditry in Northern Nigeria, notably pervasive in Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Niger, Kaduna, Kebbi, Abuja, and Kogi states, has evolved into a dire daily occurrence, primarily attributed to Fulani herders wielding sophisticated weapons. This issue has led to extensive displacement, loss of lives, and shattered communities, exacerbated by a lackadaisical government response, effectively turning criminal acts into lucrative enterprises. The socio-economic fabric of affected areas has been profoundly torn, with thousands displaced, lives lost, and families shattered. This violence has escalated into conflicts between herders and farmers, disrupting agricultural activities and posing a threat to food security. Focusing on Shiroro Local Government Area in Niger State, the study investigates banditry's socio-economic effects between 2015 and 2021. It highlights poverty's role in fuelling armed banditry and its substantial impact on socio-economic activities, as indicated by 64.5% of respondents strongly agreeing on poverty's influence. Statistical analyses support a significant relationship between poverty and banditry, as well as economic challenges and banditry attacks. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions addressing poverty, unemployment, and governance failures to curb rural armed banditry and foster socio-economic stability. Based on the findings, this study recommends: equipping security agencies, supporting youth in farming, intelligence gathering, and community engagement to combat this menace and restore peace to affected areas.

Keywords: Banditry, Displacement, Socio-economic impact, Conflict, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

In the Northern regions of Nigeria, banditry has emerged as a pervasive threat, plaguing communities and disrupting lives. Over time, this once sporadic issue has grown into a daily occurrence, particularly in states like Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Niger, Kaduna, Kebbi, Abuja, and Kogi (Ezikeudu, & Tersoo, 2023). The perpetrators, often identified as Fulani herders, conduct relentless attacks involving kidnapping, looting, raping, killings, and destruction of property, wielding sophisticated weapons like AK-47s. The toll is devastating thousands displaced, lives lost, families shattered, and communities left in despair (Ross, 2022). The government's response has been deemed lackadaisical, exacerbating the situation as these criminal acts have turned into lucrative businesses for the perpetrators.

The repercussions of this banditry are profound and multifaceted. Notably, the socio-economic fabric of affected areas has been severely torn (Moazzami, 2019). Reports indicate that between 2018 and 2020, over 5,000 lives were lost, while approximately 309,000 individuals were internally displaced, and 60,000

became refugees due to these attacks (Soto, 2023). The victims, predominantly women, children, and the elderly, face displacement, financial ruin, and psychological trauma. This violence has escalated into conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of property, and disruption of agricultural activities, thereby posing a significant threat to food security in the region (Okeke and Nnamani, 2023).

In Niger State, particularly in Shiroro Local Government Area, banditry has escalated since around 2017, reaching a crescendo in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Attah and Sule, 2023). Shiroro LGA has become a hub for banditry activities, profoundly affecting rural dwellers engaged in agricultural production, cattle rearing, and other livelihood activities. The attacks not only threaten lives but also disrupt the economic stability of the region, impacting income generation and livelihoods. Understanding the socio-economic effects of rural banditry in this area between 2015 and 2021 is crucial to comprehending the extent of the damage inflicted on the communities and devising strategies for recovery and resilience (Abdussalam et al., 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The pervasive nature of banditry in Niger State, particularly in Shiroro Local Government Area, presents a grave challenge to both human security and socio-economic development. Despite governmental efforts to address this menace, banditry continues to persist, leading to widespread unrest, unemployment, and the entrenchment of social vices within affected communities. The recurrent nature of these criminal activities undermines the effectiveness of implemented policies and interventions, perpetuating a climate of fear and insecurity that significantly disrupts various socio-economic activities such as agriculture, transportation, and other economic pursuits within the state. As a result, this study aims to comprehensively investigate the socio-economic ramifications of rural banditry in Shiroro LGA between 2015 and 2021, shedding light on the multifaceted impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the affected populace.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value in shedding light on the persistent insecurity caused by banditry in Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions, and its profound impact on the country's economic development. Addressing a research gap in comprehensive analysis, it aims to provide crucial insights into the intricate relationship between insecurity and economic stability. The findings will offer policymakers, scholars, students, and researchers valuable information to understand the complexities of Nigeria's security challenges, facilitating informed decision-making and further research endeavours on similar subjects in the future.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

Banditry

Banditry, evolving across time and context, embodies a spectrum of unlawful activities perpetrated by armed groups for personal gain. It encompasses raiding, violence, and theft, from cattle rustling to armed robbery and kidnapping (James, 2023). In Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, banditry involves attacks on villages, travellers, and communities, perpetuated by gangs dispossessing individuals of valuables. Motivations behind banditry vary, ranging from economic gains to political or ideological motives. Contrary to historical perceptions in Europe and the Americas, where some bandits were viewed as fighters for emancipation, African contexts predominantly see banditry entwined with violence, including cattle rustling and rampant destruction of property (Olapeju and Peter, 2021). In recent years, rural banditry in Nigeria has escalated, leading to widespread trauma, loss of lives, forced displacement, and monumental devastation

across various states, notably marked by massacres using sophisticated weapons (Rosenje et al., 2022).

Socio-Economic Development

Development, as a multifaceted concept, revolves around empowering individuals to maximize their potential and harness natural resources to meet daily needs. It encompasses positive transformations across social, economic, political, and cultural realms, aiming for sustained improvements in societal well-being (Mehta et al., 2023). Economic development, often gauged through indicators like GDP, life expectancy, literacy, and employment levels, seeks progress in providing sustainable livelihoods, education, and healthcare access for the populace (Dwyer, 2023). Economic growth, an integral part of development, signifies the increase in a nation's real output per capita over time, contributing to the expansion of production possibilities and paving the way for structural changes and a more equitable distribution of income and wealth within a society. Socio-economic development, therefore, embodies the intertwined process of social and economic transformation, evaluated through various indicators such as GDP, literacy rates, employment levels, and investment rates (Sun et al., 2023).

Impact of Banditry on Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

Banditry in Nigeria, notably escalating in recent times, has inflicted severe socio-economic consequences across various regions. Incidents of bandit attacks on travellers, villages, and even state officials have left many dead, injured, or kidnapped, leading to substantial disruptions along major transportation routes (Kitabu, 2023). States like Zamfara have become epicentres for rural banditry, witnessing massacres, looting, and violence, prompting government interventions such as suspending mining activities and deploying additional troops. The absence of adequate security poses a grave threat to economic growth and development, causing disruptions in businesses, closure of ventures, reduction in foreign direct investments, and dislocation of livelihoods (Obia, 2020). Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has significantly deterred investment due to bombings, killings, and destruction of property, resulting in declining foreign direct investment and businesses shutting down, notably impacting states like Yobe. Additionally, the surge in kidnapping cases, especially in regions like the Southeast and Southwest, has led to closures of businesses as ransom demands affect business operations and prompt relocations to safer regions (Muhammad and Hussain, 2021). Overall, the lack of effective governance aggravates these security challenges, contributing to social injustice, environmental degradation, and inequalities that affect vulnerable populations.

Causes of banditry in Niger State

Banditry in Niger State, particularly in areas like Shiroro LGA, stems from a complex interplay of factors. Socio-economic disparities, limited access to education and opportunities, competition over dwindling resources, porous borders facilitating movement, and historical grievances contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of banditry (Igba *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the presence of ungoverned spaces, weak law enforcement, and the proliferation of small arms exacerbate the situation. These multifaceted issues create an environment where disenfranchised individuals often resort to banditry as a means of survival or to address perceived injustices, leading to ongoing cycles of violence and instability (Ojogiwa and Mubangizi, 2023).

Policies on Banditry in the Affected Areas Specifically Shiroro Local Government Area

In Shiroro Local Government Area of Nigeria, government policies aimed at addressing banditry have varied in their effectiveness and implementation. Despite efforts such as increased military presence and community policing initiatives, challenges persist due to factors like porous borders, inadequate infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities, as highlighted in a recent report by the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2023). While some policies have focused on military responses to combat banditry,

there is a growing recognition of the need for holistic approaches that address underlying socio-economic grievances and strengthen community resilience. However, gaps remain in the implementation of such comprehensive strategies, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of local dynamics and targeted interventions to effectively mitigate the threat of rural banditry in Shiroro and similar regions.

Implementation and Recommendations on Government Policies on Banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area

Policies on banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area have been implemented through various strategies, including increased military presence, community policing initiatives, and socio-economic development programs. However, the effectiveness of these policies has been mixed, with challenges persisting due to factors like porous borders, inadequate infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities. According to recent studies by Attah and Sule (2023), while military interventions have led to short-term reductions in banditry incidents, sustainable solutions require addressing underlying socio-economic grievances and fostering community resilience. Recommendations include strengthening community policing mechanisms, improving infrastructure and access to basic services, and implementing targeted economic empowerment initiatives to address root causes of banditry and enhance long-term stability in Shiroro and similar regions.

Comparing Banditry across Africa to Nigeria and Policies in tackling banditry

Comparing banditry across Africa to Nigeria reveals both shared challenges and divergent approaches to tackling this complex security threat. In Nigeria, policies aimed at addressing banditry have ranged from military interventions to socio-economic development initiatives, although implementation effectiveness varies. Meanwhile, in other African countries, strategies such as community engagement, conflict resolution mechanisms, and regional cooperation have been emphasized. For instance, in Mali and Niger Republic, efforts to combat banditry have involved joint military operations with neighbouring countries and investment in community-based security initiatives (United Nations, 2023). Similarly, in Kenya, the establishment of community policing forums and dialogue with pastoralist communities has contributed to reducing banditry incidents in certain regions (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2022). These examples underscore the importance of context-specific approaches and multi-dimensional strategies in addressing banditry across Africa, highlighting the need for evidence-based policies devoid of political bias to effectively mitigate this security challenge.

Empirical Reviews

Abdussalam et al. (2022) conducted a recent study focusing on the socio-economic impacts of banditry across multiple states in Nigeria, shedding light on the pervasive nature of this security challenge. Their research highlighted the profound similarities in the socio-economic ramifications of banditry across diverse regions, emphasizing the need for region-specific interventions tailored to local dynamics. By elucidating these commonalities, Abdussalam et al. underscored the importance of targeted approaches in addressing rural banditry, acknowledging that blanket strategies may not effectively tackle the nuanced issues faced by different communities. Their findings serve as a crucial foundation for policymakers and practitioners seeking to develop contextually relevant solutions to mitigate the socio-economic effects of banditry and foster resilience in affected areas.

On the other hand, Okeke and Nnamani (2023) delved into the importance of comparative analyses in understanding and addressing rural banditry, particularly in regions with significant agrarian economies like Zamfara and Kaduna. Their research highlighted the intricate interplay between socio-economic factors, such as land disputes and resource competition, and the prevalence of banditry in these areas. By examining shared challenges and effective strategies across multiple regions, Okeke and Nnamani emphasized the potential for cross-regional collaboration in mitigating this complex security threat. Their findings

underscored the value of learning from diverse contexts to inform more comprehensive and contextually appropriate interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of rural banditry and promoting sustainable peace and development.

Human Needs Theory

The Human Needs Theory, embraced in this study, underscores that unmet human needs can lead to conflict and disturbances within society. Rooted in the works of theorists like Maslow and Burton, it emphasizes essential human needs extending beyond basic necessities like food and shelter, encompassing security, belongingness, self-esteem, personal fulfilment, identity, cultural security, freedom, justice, and participation. While Maslow suggested a hierarchical order for these needs, Burton and others argued that these needs are sought simultaneously and intensely. Critics challenge the rigid hierarchical order of needs, emphasizing that people do not always pursue these needs in a fixed sequence. They argue that an unmet basic need can spur individuals to pursue higher-order needs and that Maslow's observations were based on a limited demographic, raising questions about the theory's universality and applicability across diverse populations (Yeşilağaç, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mix method research approach in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State which include quantitative and qualitative method of data collection, targeting a population of 402,200 residents and a sample size of 382 determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula. Through Simple Random Sampling, fairness and representativeness were ensured. Utilizing a standardized questionnaire encompassing demographic details and variable-related inquiries, primary data collection took place in both English and local languages, facilitated by research assistants. Complemented by secondary data from various sources like journals and government publications, the research instrument underwent validation for face and content validity. Analysis integrated descriptive statistics, frequency distribution, percentages, Chi-square analysis, and narrative analysis with Key Informant Interview data for a holistic understanding. Aimed at exploring the socio-economic effects of rural banditry in Shiroro LGA from 2015 to 2021, the study sought to investigate the correlation between poverty and rural armed banditry, as well as the impacts of these incidents on socio-economic activities in Niger State. The research hypotheses centred on determining the significance of the relationship between poverty and rural banditry, as well as economic challenges and banditry attacks in Shiroro LGA, positing H01: There is no significant relationship between poverty and rural banditry and H02: There is no significant relationship between economic challenges and rural banditry attacks in Niger State.

Demography of the Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents in Shiroro Local Government Area revealed significant insights. The survey, with a 94% response rate, consisted of 56% female and 44% male respondents, indicating higher participation from women. The majority of respondents fell within the age range of 18-21 years (55.9%), showcasing a youthful population's engagement. In terms of occupation, business owners accounted for the largest proportion (41.1%), highlighting entrepreneurship as a dominant occupation. Educationally, secondary certificate holders constituted the majority (61.7%), signifying a considerable level of literacy among the respondents. Religion-wise, the population was predominantly Muslim (65.3%). Regarding marital status, the survey reflected a significant proportion of single individuals (56.4%). Overall, the data portrays a demographic landscape characterized by youthful, literate, predominantly Muslim individuals, predominantly engaged in businesses, and largely comprising single individuals, providing a nuanced understanding of the population under study.

Research Question 1: What is the role of poverty on rural armed banditry in Niger State?

Table 4.1 Poverty is a cause of Banditry.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	231	64.5
Agree	108	30.2
Disagree	11	3.1
Strongly Disagree	8	2.2
Total	358	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4.7 shows that 231 responses of the respondents representing 64.5% have strongly agreed that poverty is a cause of banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state, 108 responses of the respondents representing 30.2% have agreed to support the statement, while 11 responses of the respondents representing 3.1% have disagreed that poverty is not a cause of banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State and 8 responses of the respondents representing 2.2% strongly disagreed to the assertion too. This implies that majority of the responses of the respondents strongly agreed that poverty is the cause of banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state.

Research Question 2: What are the effects of rural armed banditry on the socio-economic activities in Niger State?

Table 4.2 Banditry has affected Buying and Selling of Goods

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	250	69.8
Agree	89	24.9
Disagree	12	3.4
Strongly Disagree	7	1.9
Total	358	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4.14 shows that 250 responses of the respondents representing 69.8% have strongly agreed that one of the effects of rural armed banditry on the socio-economic activities in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger is buying and selling of goods, 89 responses of the respondents representing 24.5% have agreed to the statement too while 12 responses of the respondents representing 3.4% have disagreed that one of the effects of armed banditry on the socio-economic activities in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger is not buying and selling of goods and 7 responses of the respondents representing 1.9% have strongly disagreed to the assertion too. This implies that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that armed banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state affect the buying and selling of goods which in turn affect the socio-economic activities of the local government area.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between poverty and rural banditry in Shiroro Local

Government of Niger State

Observed	Expected	(O-E)	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
148	150.5	-2.5	-6.25	- 0.0042
10	190.5	-180.5	-32580.25	-171.0
193	7.5	185.5	34410.25	4588.0
7	9.5	-2.5	-6.25	0.0042
				$X^2 = 4,417$

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Critical $\chi^2 = 3.84$ at 0.05 error limit less than the calculated value of 4417 therefore, we reject the null hypothesis (Ho) and accept the alternative hypothesis (Hi) Ho: There is a significant relationship between poverty and rural banditry in Shiroro Local Government of Niger State. This is further evidenced by the tables 4.1 to 4.11 Similarly, Nwagboso (2012) supporting the above stated that security challenges in the country are traceable to bad governance as government has failed to address such casual factors as poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities which have led to anger, agitation and violent crimes against Nigerian state; that the activities of various militia groups.

Hypothesis Two: There is a relationship between the economic challenges and rural banditry attacks in Shiroro Local Government of Niger State

Observed	Expected	(O-E)	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
154	156.2	-2.2	-4.84	-0.03
2	197.8	-195.8	-38337.64	-193.8
198	11.8	186.2	34670.44	2938.2
2	2.2	-0.2	-0.04	-0.02
				$X^2 = 2744.35$

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Critical $\chi^2 = 3.84$ at 0.05 error limit less than the calculated value of 2744.35 therefore, we reject the null hypothesis (Ho) and accept the alternative hypothesis (Hi) Ho: There is a relationship between the economic challenges and rural banditry attacks in Shiroro Local Government of Niger State. This is further supported by tables 4.12 to 4.14.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study unveiled crucial insights into the dynamics of rural armed banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State. A substantial majority of respondents (64.5%) strongly agreed that poverty is a significant cause of banditry, emphasizing the pivotal role poverty plays in fuelling this issue. Moreover, a significant portion of respondents (69.8%) believed that armed banditry significantly affects the

buying and selling of goods, impacting the socio-economic activities within the region. Statistical analyses, including Chi-square tests, supported these perspectives, demonstrating a significant relationship between poverty and rural banditry, as well as between economic challenges and banditry attacks. These findings are corroborated by prior research and narratives that attribute security challenges to issues like poverty, unemployment, and governance failures, aligning with the observed sentiments of the respondents. Overall, the study sheds light on the interconnectedness of socio-economic factors and rural armed banditry, emphasizing poverty's prominent role and the tangible effects on local economic activities.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the intricate relationship between poverty, economic challenges, and the prevalence of rural armed banditry in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State. With a majority of respondents strongly attributing banditry to poverty and acknowledging its impact on economic activities, the findings underscore the critical role poverty plays in fuelling these security concerns. The results, backed by statistical analyses, affirm the significant association between poverty and banditry, as well as economic challenges and banditry attacks. These insights align with broader narratives linking socio-economic issues to security challenges, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive interventions addressing poverty, economic disparities, and governance failures to effectively mitigate the escalation of rural armed banditry in the region and foster socio-economic stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

1. Poverty, hunger, and unemployment make people vulnerable to radicalization and drive conflict. What is required is sincere policy implementation to lift Nigerians out of these circumstances.
2. There should be a deliberate step by the government to reduce unemployment by supporting youths through imbibe farming activities as a way of encouraging and provide them with basic incentives to boost their morale.
3. There is need for intelligence gathering to track informants of these bandits within the communities affected by the scourges.
4. There is need to sensitize and engages members of communities by security agencies on the need to collaborates in order to ensure the society is free from any form of threats.
5. There is the need to equip the security agencies with modern equipment as this will in long way help in fighting the menace in order to restore peace to the affected areas.

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