

Socioeconomic Effect of the Scourge of Banditry in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the socioeconomic effect of banditry in Niger State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The content-analysis technique was adopted to analyze and categorize the data collected into key themes of the study. The study is anchored on situational action theory explaining the reasons behind the rising banditry in Niger State. Findings revealed that the drivers of banditry in Niger State were poverty, unemployment, large swathes of ungoverned forest reserves, thriving illegal mining activities, the porosity of borders, proliferation of arms and a weak security system. It also revealed that banditry activities have led to the displacement of residents, payment of huge ransoms, abandonment of means of livelihood, and shortage of food and have triggered an adverse socioeconomic crisis for the people. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the ungoverned forests where the bandits operate need to be combed by the military personnel through an air raid and community policing should be established and equipped with security tools to enable them to secure the various communities against banditry, Nigerian porous borders should be blocked to prevent the influx of foreign criminal elements and bandits into the country, the security agencies manning the borders should be strengthened and technologies such as closed circuit cameras, drones, and other technologies should be deployed at the borders to enhance maximum security and more security personnel should be deployed to rural communities that are mostly affected by the activity of bandits.

Keywords: attacks, banditry, drivers, effects, Niger State, Nigeria

Introduction

Different parts of Nigeria are currently experiencing different levels of security challenges. These challenges include terrorism, insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, killings, armed robbery, arson, herder-farmer conflicts, attacks by unknown gunmen, ritual killings, extra-judicial killing, cybercrime, and cultism (Akinyetun, 2022; Aodu, 2022; Charles, 2021; Mosadomi, 2022; Nigeria Watch, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Olapeju & Peter, 2021; Usman & Singh, 2021). These security challenges have assumed an uneven geopolitical stance. Consequently, the persistent insecurity in Nigeria has presupposed varying magnitude in different geopolitical zones (Akinyetun, 2022). For instance, since 2009, the North East has been bedeviled by the Boko Haram insurgency, which metamorphosed into the Islamic State in West Africa Province and terrorism. The North West and North Central have been engulfed in banditry, illegal mining, ethnoreligious killings, and herder-farmer conflicts. South East has been plagued with secessionist agitation, kidnapping, attacks by unknown gunmen, ritual killings, herder-farmer clashes, and banditry. The South West has been experiencing a surge in various types of crime, including armed robbery, killings for ritual, kidnapping for ransom, cybercrime, banditry, and herder-farmer clashes. While the South-South region has been threatened by kidnapping, militancy, environmental agitation, crude oil bunkering, and sea piracy (Akinyetun, 2022; Aodu, 2022; Nigeria Watch, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Olapeju & Peter, 2021).

Observably, from these security challenges, banditry has recently come to the fore with increased activities, especially in the northern states of Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Niger, Kebbi, Taraba, Plateau, and Benue states (Akinyetun, 2022; Kuna & Jibrin 2016; Mac-Leva, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016; Usman & Singh, 2021). Since 2014 bandits have taken center stage in Nigeria's North West and North Central regions of Nigeria. However, in recent times, these regions have witnessed an escalation in deadly attacks and kidnappings by bandits (Akinyetun & Bakare, 2022; Lawal, 2022). This is reflected in the increased killings, robbing, and rustling of cattle in every nook and cranny of these regions (Usman & Singh, 2021). Notwithstanding, banditry started in the North West region of Nigeria and later expanded to other regions, which has now become a large-scale crime (Akinyetun, 2022).

In the North Central region of Nigeria, different states, particularly Niger State, have been brutally attacked by bandits. The past seven years have seen Niger State fall under the control of bandits, with 18 of the 25 local government areas experiencing persistent attacks (Amata, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022). These bandits raided several villages, farms, correctional centers, schools, hostels, highways, etc. Their attacks have resulted in numerous deaths and kidnapping for ransom, which has become common in affected locations. A family with loved ones in captivity will be forced to sell off all their property to secure the release of the victims (Lawal, 2022).

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Bandit activities include kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, burning homes, shooting, killing, raping, raiding, and robbing villagers and tourists (Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), 2020; Mac-Leva, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Usman & Singh, 2021). Consequently, banditry is one of the criminal activities that have harmed the security of the communities, the development of the country, and the peaceful coexistence of the citizens and residents. The activities of bandits have had a profound impact on the security and resources of the country (Charles, 2021). Their activities have posed a major security threat as villagers no longer feel safe in places they once called home (Lawal, 2022). Thus, the activities of bandits have posed a serious threat to the livelihoods of rural dwellers and the entire people of the North (Usman & Singh, 2021). The current situation in Nigeria is causing significant harm to the well-being of its citizens, and it is having negative consequences on socio-political and economic development. Banditry is rising in Nigeria, which has serious implications for food security, human security, and national security (Akinyetun, 2022).

The rampant banditry across the country has resulted in many deaths, destruction of property, displacement of people, desertion of communities, loss of billions of naira in ransom payments, interruption of children's education, and a host of other negative consequences. (Aodu, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022; Usman & Singh, 2021). Data from the ICIR's Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) indicates that from 2022, January to March 1,308 people were killed in violent attacks, while 1,333 people were kidnapped across Nigeria by bandits (Abolade, 2022). From the data, Niger state reported the highest number of deaths from insecurity in the country, with 787 deaths in 90 days. This implies that eight people died from violent attacks each day in the first quarter of 2022 in Niger State. Also, the data further indicate that Zamfara State had 337 fatalities, Borno State had 322 fatalities, Kaduna State had 230, and Katsina State had 203 fatalities (Abolade, 2022).

Presently, the frequency of attacks by bandits in Niger State is increasing, with deadly cases being reported daily. Bandits attack and loot villages, kidnap residents for ransom, and subject even women and children to unspeakable horror. (Asishana, 2021). Niger State's residents are currently living on the margins due to the constant attacks and raids of bandits from their communities. The bandits seem to have a reprehensible mission of wiping out the entire population of these communities (Mosadomi, 2022). Long ago, these bandits operated in isolated communities with little or no law enforcement. Today, the gangs have come out in full force, attacking communities indiscriminately without regard for whether there is any security personnel nearby or not (Mosadomi, 2022).

Banditry which began slowly through cattle stirring in the Shiroro local government area of Niger state in 2015, has become out of control and has spread to other local government areas of the State (Mosadomi, 2021). As a result of this, inhabitants across Niger State communities have been experiencing a surge in attacks by bandits in recent months. This is causing serious problems for the residents of these communities (Mosadomi, 2022). In the process, bandits slaughtered many men, women, and children like livestock while demanding huge ransoms from those who let go of their lives and property. Since the outbreak of the banditry in Niger State, 10,000 members of different communities have been displaced (Mosadomi, 2022). Since 2021 there have been rising violent attacks by bandits across communities in Niger state. For instance, in 2021, February 42 people were abducted by bandits for ransom in Kagara; among them were 27 students (Abankula, 2021). The bandits capped their reign of impunity by kidnapping over 200 Tegna Islamiyya School, Niger State students in 2022, June (Abankula, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). On 2022, January 11 thirteen people were killed in an attack by bandits in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State. Again, on 2022, January 14 five vigilante members were killed when bandits attacked local markets and some communities in the Shiroro local government area of the State (Umoru, 2022).

Bothered by the recent and persistent bandit invasion across communities in Niger state, the current Governor of the State, Abubakar Sani Bello raised the alarm in 2022, January that 18 of

the 25 Local Government Areas of the State had been attacked by bandits and seven of these local government areas such as Shiroro, Munyan, Rafi, Mashegu, Mariga, Lavun, and Paiko had constantly almost completely overrun by bandits. He thus called for a concrete effort to deal with the threat posed by the bandits (Amata, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022). The senate was perturbed by the increasing cases of banditry in Nigeria, especially in Niger State, and the massive killings and reckless destruction of property that has been happening. They passed a resolution on the issue on 2022, January 17 and appealed to the Federal Government to declare a full-fledged war on bandits as they are now considered terrorists (Umoru, 2022). Sequel to the demand of the senate to curb banditry, especially in Niger state, the Federal Government gave the matching order to the chief security officers of the Nigeria security apparatuses to deploy security personnel to the affected localities to flush out the bandits. Before then, the state government made concerted efforts to end banditry in the State by granting amnesty to the bandits and setting up vigilante groups to secure the communities (Maishanu, 2022; Mohammed, 2021).

Despite these efforts toward addressing banditry in Niger State, the spates of banditry have astronomically increased. The bandits now strike mostly during the daytime, and despite being challenged by security agents, they continue to operate with impunity (Mosadomi, 2021). This shows that the Nigeria security chiefs, working with President Muhammadu Buhari, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, have failed to curb banditry in Niger state in particular and Nigeria as a whole. Thus, there is a need to assess the socio-political and economic implications of these persistent attacks and killings by bandits in Niger State to find a sustainable solution to banditry.

Conceptual Discourse

Banditry

Conceptually the term banditry which is inferred from the word bandit, implies an unlawful armed group that terrorizes people and takes possession of their properties. In other words, bandits are a group of criminals who utilize weapons to carry out assaults against individuals to steal, rob, kidnap, or murder them. In this regard, banditry refers to an organized crime that includes kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle theft, and abuse of environmental assets (Akinyetun, 2022; Brenner, 2021). To Eyikomisan et al. (2021), banditry can encompass a range of criminal activities, including those affiliated with various non-ethnic and ethnic factors. For example, many of the recent large-scale outfitted assaults are suspected to have been carried out by Fulani raiders.

According to Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), banditry refers to cases of armed robbery or related violent crimes such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and raids in villages or markets. It involves the use of force, or the threat to that end, to intimidate someone or a group of people to pillage, rape, or kill (Okoli & Okpaleke 2014). Similarly, Okoli (2019) refers to banditry as a form of armed violence that is driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. The pursuit of economic gain is the driving force behind many bandit activities and attacks. The victims of banditry are people and communities whose possessions have value. Nigeria's foremost common forms of banditry are armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, and village raids (Okoli, 2019). In the same direction, Usman & Singh (2021) opined that banditry means the act of rustling, stealing, robbing agricultural produce, livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry, etc.) and raiding farms as well as villages by unknown armed men.

On the other hand, Hassan (2021) refers to bandits as criminal gangs that have terrorized Nigeria's rural areas, especially in the northwest and north-central regions of Nigeria. They have killed, kidnapped, forced people out of their homes, and taunted the authorities with their hardheartedness. Villages are often attacked by bandit gangs on motorcycles, who shoot all the young men they can find on the assumption that they are members of local vigilante groups and after that, they often take livestock and other valuable items away with them (Hassan, 2021). On the

contrary, Okoli & Ugwu (2019) noted two interests that motivate banditry in Nigeria. These are economic and political interests. Economic interest refers to behavior motivated by the need for material wealth, while political interest is driven by the desire to rob, assault, or eliminate people based on their political or ideological beliefs. Regardless, Nigeria's bandit violence has its roots in clashes between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers over land and resources. But in retaliation for other actions, the cycle of violence has continued to spiral out of control (Aljazeera News, 2022). Thus, banditry commenced with petty stealing and graduated into murder, kidnapping, armed robbery, terrorism, rape, raiding, etc. (Sunnewsonline, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study tries to explain the reasons behind the scourge of banditry in Niger State using Situational Action Theory (SAT). Situational action theory was developed by Per-Olof Wikström in 2004 and since then, it has been used to help explain how people respond to different situations (Wikström, 2020). The theory focuses on the motives behind terrorism, banditry, insurgency kidnapping, and armed robbery. It tries to explain why people become motivated to commit crimes, considering the effects of ecological, criminological, sociological, and behavioral factors. Agreeing with Wikström (2020), crime is an activity that breaks the law and may be a result of the transaction between an individual's introduction to criminal environments and the penchant for culpability, that's, an individual's time in an unsupervised or ineffectively administered space and level of self-control decide the event of a crime. According to situational action theory, crime is usually motivated by an individual's sense of right and wrong in the context of the situation. People are responsible for their actions, but the causes of their actions are situational. Criminal behavior is the result of a decision made after considering various options and factors in a particular situation. According to this theory, a crime is committed when an individual believes it is the right thing to do in the current situation and/or does not apply common sense when making decisions (Wikström, 2020).

Situational action theory is hinged on four key factors: the individual (mental makeup, past experiences, and so on), the setting (the environment the individual is exposed to), the situation (the choices made as a result of interaction with the environment), and the action (the individual's conduct) (Wikström, 2020). The theory argues that people's criminal tendencies vary depending on their environment. The environment in which an individual finds himself affects whether a crime will be committed or not. For instance, someone living in a situation of multi-dimensional poverty and lacking a guardian will likely become involved in crime. Crime occurrence results from two factors: the individual's criminal propensity and the criminogenic incentive in the setting. A person with a low propensity for crime due to strong moral rectitude and/or the presence of governmental authority will be less likely to have criminal incentives, while a person with a high propensity for crime will be less likely to resist incitement to crime (Wikström, 2020). To develop crime tendency, the theory explains that an individual's propensity to commit crimes is influenced by the presence of crime-supportive moral contexts and the individual's sensitivity to the influence of these contexts (Bouhana & Wikström, 2011).

Following Wikström's postulations, the rise in banditry in Niger state and other states in the northern region is due to the interface between and among the bandits and the environment (Wikström, 2020). From these postulations, it is germane to note that the situation and settings make an individual more vulnerable to crime. Due to the mental experience of multifaceted poverty, unemployment, marginalization, inequality, displacement, injustice, and exclusion, as well as the prevailing situation in the setting, such as under-governed spaces, unlawful mining activities, the proliferation of arms and weapons, and ineffectively prepared security device, incite a negative circumstance which energizes deadly activity such as banditry and insurgency. In this way, the rise in banditry in Niger state and other states within the northern region of Nigeria is

inferable to the effects of adverse socioeconomic conditions on the people there. The setting is characterized by repeating social disquietude. Therefore, negative choices result from interaction with the setting, which leads to criminal activity (Akinyetun, 2022).

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the drivers of rising banditry in Niger State.
2. To ascertain the extent of attacks and killings by bandits in Niger State.
3. To assess the political and socioeconomic effect of banditry in Niger State.
4. To suggest ways of tackling banditry in Niger state.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Niger State, situated in Nigeria's north-central geopolitical zone. The capital of Niger State is Minna; the State is made up of 25 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Niger State, the largest State in Nigeria with a massive land area of 86,000 km², was formed in 1976 from the former Northwestern States. This makes it about 9.3% of the country's total land area. The State shares borders with the Republic of Benin to the west, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to the south-east, Zamfara to the North, Kebbi to the northwest, Kwara to the south-west, and Kaduna to the north-east.

The study adopted a survey research design. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data collection was based on interviews with key individuals while the secondary data were generated from documentary evidence, internet materials, newspapers, official and empirical reports, journal articles, and textbooks publications that are related to banditry activities in Niger State within the period under study. Due to security restrictions and explosive and impenetrable situations in the study area, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample from the study population. These consist of security operatives (the police, army, and vigilante groups), community leaders, and government officials. All 16 participants were interviewed. These consist of 6 government officials, 6 community leaders, and 4 security operatives. These participants were purposively selected from the two local government areas (Shiroro and Munya) that the bandits have majorly attacked. Data collected from the interview were transcribed, edited, and categorized into themes reflecting the study's objectives, while data collected from secondary sources were content analyzed and interpreted descriptively.

Results and Discussion

The data from the study were analyzed and classified according to the objectives of the study as follows:

The Factors Driving the Rise of Banditry in Niger State

There are different factors engendering the rise of banditry in Niger state. Data collected from the respondents attributed the causes of the rising banditry in Niger state to perceived socioeconomic marginalization which has made people devise crime options for livelihood, weak governance in the rural areas, high rate of youth unemployment that have invariably induced some of the youth to criminal actions such as banditry, high rate of poverty, inadequate deployment of security agents to the rural areas, vast, impenetrable forests due to lack of roads which have served as a haven for bandits, unregulated and illegal thriving gold mining sites which have attracted the bandits to penetrate, raids and kidnap the miners for ransom and gold, porous borders which have enabled the influx of foreign bandits into the country and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. However, one of the respondents differed from the above reasons for engendering banditry. Below is an excerpt from him:

The rising spate of banditry we have been encountering in our communities is because banditry is now a lucrative

business. The bandits make much money from kidnapping, rustling cattle, and raiding our villages for cash, farm produce, and other valuables. For instance, any time they kidnap anyone here, they usually charge huge amounts of money for ransom before the victim is released. Because of the money they are making, especially for kidnapping, they keep coming here for kidnapping now and then. Hence, the business of banditry will continue to thrive here. Besides, there is the connivance of the bandits with top government officials and security personnel. They are in support of the bandits if not by now, they would have arrested those bandits that have been terrorizing us here (Field Report, 2022).

The above statement corroborated the assertion expressed by the secretary to the state governor as captured by Maishanu (2022) on Sunrise Television program concerning the rise of banditry in Niger State from Channels Television on 2022, February 1st, as thus: Bandits have become very successful in their business of abducting victims. They make a lot of money from this activity. The group uses a lot of its money to purchase more weapons, which fortifies and supports its ability to continue its activities (Maishanu, 2022).

Furthermore, as claimed by the respondents, most of these factors driving banditry in Niger state also corroborate with the findings of Akinyetun (2022) which indicated that several factors have contributed to the resurrection of banditry in Nigeria. These include socioeconomic problems, weak law enforcement, and the presence of gangs and organized crime. These factors are responsible for the proliferation of insecurity in under-governed spaces, the prevalence of small arms and light weapons, a weak security apparatus, socioeconomic conditions such as poverty and unemployment, cattle rustling, and illegal mining activities (Akinyetun, 2022). Similarly, Hamza (2021) affirmed that the proliferation of arms, poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, unregulated and illegal gold mining, and the vast forests have served as a haven for the intensified banditry in Niger State and other states in the northern region of Nigeria. Similarly, Olapeju & Peter (2021) noted that Nigeria's bandits result from poverty, weak leadership, bad governance, arms proliferation, weak state institutions, corruption, and state fragility.

On the contrary, Uche & Iwuamadi (2018) stressed that banditry is rising due to the complex relationship between herdsman and farmers. Herdsmen's ongoing migration results from desertification, drought, climate change, cattle rustling, insurgency, and population growth. Consequently, the movement of herders has led to clashes with farmers over the encroachment of farmland and the destruction of crops. In some cases, these clashes have led to the reckless destruction of life and property of both the farmers and herders, contributing to the level of insecurity in the country (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). From the foregoing, different factors have been adduced as the driver of banditry in Niger state and Nigeria. Some of these drivers of banditry are elaborately discussed below:

Under Governed Spaces

Under-governed or ungoverned spaces are zones, territories, or areas that lie beyond the reach of the government and create a large threat to safety measures and stability in Nigeria (Akinwale, 2022). In other words, under-governed space refers to an area where the State control is insufficient due to the topography and remoteness which constraints the State's security agencies to curtail the activities of non-state actors that threaten the peaceful cohabitation of the society (Usman & Singh, 2021). There are various ungoverned spaces in the northern regions of Nigeria. These ungoverned spaces and vast forests that have served as a safe haven for criminals are other critical factors that have exacerbated banditry (Hamza, 2021). The prevalence of under-governed spaces where the government's control is inadequate and ineffective is a major cause of the scourge of banditry (Ojo, 2020). In some areas of the country, the government's control is minimal or nonexistent, but they are governed differently from larger communities. Bandits and other criminal gangs overrun these poorly governed territories because of their isolation, which

allows for the continuation of a collection of illegal business activities. This is why illegal economic activities are so common in these areas. Such areas are characterized by cattle rustling, illegal mining, human trafficking, piracy, kidnapping, and raiding. There are many large forests in various parts of Nigeria. Some of these forests are in the Rumah/Kukar Jangarai, Kamuku, Balmo, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Kano states. (Akinyetun, 2022). These vast unregulated forests make them ideal for hiding, and police and military forces have difficulty penetrating the rough terrain (Muhammad, 2021).

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Nigeria has seen an increase in the flow of small arms and light weapons from neighboring Sahelian states since the fall of Ghaddafi's regime in Libya. This has led to the weapons ending up in the hands of non-state actors, such as terrorists and bandits (Gaye, 2018). The movements of these arms into Nigeria were enabled by the porosity of Nigeria's land and sea borders. The borders are porous and poorly guided; hence, they remain the channel for the small and light weapons being trafficked into the country for operations by bandits and other armed groups (Egbejule, 2022). Thus, under-policed Nigeria's borders have aided the proliferation of small arms and light weapons' among bandits and criminal groups (Muhammad, 2021). The porosity of Nigeria's borders has increased the influx of arms and weapons from the neighboring African countries, thus increasing the opportunities for crime and criminalities throughout the country. In addition, the availability of vast forests in northern regions and the increasing illegal arms trade make it easier for criminals to get weapons. Again, the socioeconomic conditions in the northern region of Nigeria make the youth particularly vulnerable to being recruited into criminal activities (Akinyetun, 2022).

Socioeconomic Conditions

Generally, the socioeconomic conditions of Nigerian citizens are appalling. Several socioeconomic challenges are currently facing Nigerians, such as poverty, unemployment, deprivation, inequality, marginalization, and lack of access to basic amenities. Although the national challenges facing the northern states are significant, they are primarily experienced by the North. (Akinyetun, 2022). In the northern region of Nigeria, banditry has become an attractive way of making money due to weak governance and high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. This has led to people turning to banditry as a way to make a living, which has led to increased crime (Muhammad, 2021). Besides the issues of border porosity, and proliferation of arms, the states in the northern region are leading in terms of unemployment and poor people in Nigeria and these two variables are triggers of criminality and social problems that the region is facing (Fevisipo, 2021). For instance, Zamfara, Jigawa, and Sokoto each have poverty rates of 74%, 87%, and 87.7%. (Abdulrasheed, 2020).

These conditions in this region make crime and banditry more likely to occur. Thus, Alao et al. (2015) link banditry, terrorism, and other criminal acts in the northern region of Nigeria to poverty is understandable. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all forms of criminality are associated with poverty; it has been argued that economic deprivation can influence people to resort to illegal means to meet their daily needs. However, the prevalence of poverty, widespread unemployment, poor governance, and poor service delivery in the northern region of Nigeria has been attributed to the increase in illegal activities, making the youth susceptible to involvement in crime and criminalities (Akinyetun, 2022).

Illegal Mining Activities

Another reason banditry is common in Nigeria is the illegal mining activities in the northwest and north-central parts of the country. Illegal mining is a major issue in Zamfara, Niger, Katsina, and Kebbi states and it has caused much bloodshed over control of minefields. This has led to the deaths of thousands of people

(International Crisis Group, 2020). In addition, due to the displacement caused by the conflict, the region's people have to resort to banditry to make ends meet (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Weak Security Apparatus

The inadequate and lack of rural security coupled with the protection offered by a vast unregulated forest in most states in the North, especially Niger State, has provided the conditions for banditry to thrive (Eyikomisan et al., 2021). In addition, the Nigerian police are understaffed and poorly equipped, making it difficult to protect the population and promote security in under-governed areas. This major factor encourages criminality in these areas (Akinyetun, 2022; Ojo, 2020). Thus, the Nigerian security agencies are inadequate and understaffed and they lack the equipment and resources to effectively combat banditry in rural areas (Muhammad, 2021).

The Extent of Attacks and Killings by Bandits in Niger State

On the level of bandits' attacks in Niger State, all the respondents stated that they have encountered and witnessed incessant attacks of bandits across villages and communities in Niger State in recent times. Some of the excerpts from the respondents are stated below:

The bandits usually attack us now and then. These attacks have become a daily activity with dire consequences. They move from one village to the other on motorcycles killing,

kidnapping people, and rusting cows. No day goes by without people being kidnapped by bandits. Many people have been kidnapped and I cannot specifically tell you the number. Kidnapping incidents here have become so widespread that we are no longer safe moving about or even going to our farmlands (Field Report, 2022).

We have been attacked here severally. Scores of our members have been killed. They usually ambush us at checkpoints before carrying out raids and kidnappings in our communities and in the process of confronting them, some of our members have lost their lives. Our challenge is that we don't have enough workforce and sophisticated weapons like the ones bandits usually possess. Besides, nobody wants to join vigilante groups because of payments and welfare conditions (Field Report, 2022).

The incidences of banditry in Niger State have astronomically increased in recent times. Since 2020, bandit attacks have increased in communities in Niger State, resulting in a high number of deadly cases. The bandits usually attack, raid villages and schools, kidnapping the residents and students for ransom, set ablaze their houses, loot, steal livestock, and cattle rustling (Abankula, 2021; Ahmadu-Suka et al., 2021; Ajibola, 2022; Al Jazeera News, 2021; Amata, 2022; Asishana, 2021; Mosadomi, 2021; Mosadomi, 2022; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Reports from various media have shown that bandits have carried out numerous attacks in Niger State. Some of these bandits' attacks and killings are shown in the table below:

Table 1

Summary of Bandit Attacks and Killings in Niger State from 2020, January to 2022, July

Date (Source)	Location	Death/casualties	Nature/place of attack
2020, January 26 (Dipo, 2020)	Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State	11 persons were killed and scores of others were kidnapped while some women were raped	Bandits attacked some Niger communities, killed 11 people, abducted scores of others and raped women. The incident took place at the Kudodo, Galapai, Dnakpala, Makera, and Dnalgwa villages of Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State
2020, June 25 (Romoke, 2020)	Shiroro LGA of Niger State	4 persons were killed	Bandits killed 4 persons in the Sunko, Gavya, and Marafa communities in the Manta District of Shiroro LGA of Niger State
2020, July 21 (Opara, 2020)	Rafi LGA, Niger State	16 persons were kidnapped	Bandits attacked and kidnapped 16 persons in Magani and Tungan-Bajo communities of Rafi LGA, Niger State
2020, August 17 (Onyedinefu, 2020)	Tashan Kare, Niger State.	3 Soldiers were killed	Bandits attacked and killed 3 soldiers trying to repel their attack in Tashan Kare, Niger State
2020, September 4 (Vanguard, 2020)	Dukku and Kagara towns, Niger State	22 persons were killed	Bandits kill 22 people, including 19 vigilantes in Dukku and Kagara towns of Niger State
2020, October 13 (Sani & Atori, 2020)	Kagara town of Rafi LGA of Niger State	14 persons were killed, 3 injured and 1 kidnapped	Bandits killed 14 persons in Kastina State and Kagara town of Rafi LGA of Niger State
2020, November 20 (Mosadomi, 2020)	Mariya LGA of Niger State	A policeman was killed while 13 persons were kidnapped	Bandits kidnap 14 persons and killed a mobile policeman in Mariya LGA of Niger State
2020, December 13 (Minna, 2020)	Shiroro LGA of Niger State	1 person was Killed and 20 others were kidnapped	Bandits killed a pastor of ECWA Gospel and kidnapped 20 people in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state
2021, February 2 (Sahara Reporters, 2021)	Kanyan and Sabon Gida communities in Kurebe Ward in Niger State,	27 persons were killed, and 40 persons were kidnapped	Bandits attacked and killed 27 persons, injured 20 others and abducted no fewer than 40 persons in Kanyan and Sabon Gida communities in Kurebe Ward in Niger State
2021, February 17 (Oluchi, 2021)	Kagara LGA of Niger State	41 persons were kidnapped	Bandits kidnapped 41 persons (students, teachers, and their family members from the Government Science College Kagara
2021, April 3 (Xinhua, 2021)	The military base at Allawa town of the Shiroro local government area of Niger State	14 persons were killed	Bandits numbering about 200 killed six soldiers, one policeman, and seven people and abducted several others when they attacked the military base at Allawa town of the Shiroro local government area of Niger State
2021, April 12 (Olufemi, 2021)	Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State.	5 persons were killed	Bandits attacked and killed 5 vigilante members on a local market in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State

Date (Source)	Location	Death/casualties	Nature/place of attack
2021, April 27 (Sun, 2021)	Shiroro and Munya local government areas of Niger State	35 persons were kidnapped	In an attack at Chiri, Gini, and Fuka communities in Shiroro and Munya local government areas of Niger State, bandits abducted 35 people and injured several others
2021, May 30 (BBC, 2021)	Tegina town of Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State	1 person was killed and 136 pupils were kidnapped	Bandits invaded Salihu Tanko Islamiyya school in Tegina town, killed one person, and abducted 136 pupils of the school
2021, September 4 (Minna, 2021)	Magami community in the Shiroro local government area of Niger state	20 persons were killed	Bandits in large numbers invaded the Magami community in the Shiroro local government area of Niger state and killed 20 villagers in what a source close to the community said was a reprisal attack by the gunmen
2021, October 1 (Ahmad, 2021)	Munya Local Government Area of Niger state	10 persons were burnt alive, several others were killed and 7 women were kidnapped	Bandits burned 10 people alive, several others were killed, and 7 women were kidnapped in an attack in the Kachiwe community of Sakimpawa district, Munya local government area, Niger state
2021, November 15 (Nathaniel, 2021)	Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State	4 persons were kidnapped	Bandits kidnapped 4 persons in Tegina in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State
2022, January 5 (Bonny, 2022)	Zunguru Niger State	2 were killed while 2 Chinese expatriates kidnapped	Bandits killed two Niger State natives and abducted two Chinese expatriates working on a hydroelectric dam in Zunguru
2022, January 19 (Dachen, 2022)	300 communities in Niger State	220 persons comprising civilians, security personnel, and local vigilantes, were killed	Governor Abubakar Sani Bello of Niger State said that in January of 2022, 220 people - 165 civilians, 25 security personnel, and 30 local vigilantes - were killed in 50 cases of bandit attacks in the State
2022, January 23 (Dipo, 2022)	Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State	1 person was killed and 15 persons were kidnapped	Bandits killed one person and abducted 15 other villagers in Batagari village, Maikujeri district of Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State
2022, February 1 (Maishanu, 2022)	Shiroro and Paikoro local government areas of Niger State.	11 Joint Security Taskforce members were killed	Over 100 bandits raided many communities in broad daylight and killed 11 Joint Security Taskforce and injured several villagers.
2022, February 27 (Sahara Reports. 2022)	Mashegu, Lavun, and Wushishi Local Government areas in Niger State	17 persons were killed and several others were kidnapped	Bandits attacked and killed 17 people, kidnapped several others, and rustled cows belonging to villagers in Mashegu, Lavun, and Wushishi Local Government areas of the State
2022, March 15 (Maishanu, 2022)	Nasko village, Magama LGA of Niger State	7 persons including a DPO were killed	Bandits kill DPO and six others in Niger state
2022, April 8 (Wakaso, 2022)	Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State	3 persons were killed while undisclosed others were kidnapped	Bandits killed three people, and several others were injured in an attack in the Rumache-Madalla community in Bassa/Kukoki Ward, Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State. Many others were abducted in the attack.
2022, June 25 (Dennis, 2022)	Lapai local government area of Niger State	3 vigilante men were killed	Bandits killed 3 vigilante men and injured many others during an attack in the Kpada community, Lapai Local Government area of Niger State
2022, June 30 (Maishanu, 2022)	Gurmana Ward of Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State	37 persons comprising military personnel, mobile policemen, and civilians were killed while 4 Chinese Miners and others were kidnapped	Bandits invaded a mining site on Wednesday 29/6/2022, at Ajata-Aboki in Gurmana Ward of Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State, killing 20 military personnel, seven mobile policemen, and scores of civilians. They also kidnapped 4 Chinese Miners and others
2022, July 22 (Dennis, 2022)	Munya local government area of Niger state	5 persons were killed while about 50 people were kidnapped	Bandits attacked and killed 5 persons and kidnapped 50 people on 21/7/22 in the Kuchi community of Munya Local Government area of Niger state

Note. Source: Compiled by author from news media.

Data from Table 1 above shows that there have been increased and persistent bandits attacks, raids, abductions, and killings in Niger State. The table indicated that from 2020, January 2020 to 2022, July those bandits had carried out 29 attacks which resulted in the raiding of villages, burning of houses, burning of 10 people alive, raping of several women, injuring scores of persons, kidnapping of over 304 persons and killing of 512 persons. The table also shows that most of the bandits' attacks in Niger State were carried majorly in Shiroro, Rafi, and Munya Local Government Areas. This confirmed the statement credited to the State Governor, Abubakar Sani Bello that some local government areas of the State, such as Shiroro, Munya, Rafi, Mashegu, Mariga, Lavun, and Paiko, had constantly almost completely overrun by bandits (Amata, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022).

The Effects of Banditry on Socio-political and Economic Activities in Niger State

On what could be the effects of banditry in Niger state, all the respondents stated that they have directly and indirectly suffered severe attacks of bandits which have resulted in the loss of lives, displacement of residents, payment of huge ransom to release their kidnapped family members, destruction of their houses, abandonment of farmlands due to constant raids by bandits, loss of means of livelihood, loss of farm produce and animals, truncation of their children education and so on (Field Report, 2022). Some of the excerpts of the interviewees are stated below:

We don't longer have access to our farmlands due to the constant attacks by bandits. This usually happens during the time of cultivation. They usually come in groups, raid our

farmlands and take away our farm produce. In the process, they rape our women and kidnapped and even killed our men who attempted to resist their raid. They usually warn us not to come to our farmlands and whoever dares them will be kidnapped or killed (Field Report, 2022).

Kidnapping is a booming business for the bandits here. They keep coming here to kidnap our people. Sometimes they raid the entire village, cart away our valuables, and burn our houses. Due to incessant attacks and kidnappings of our people, most of the residents have fled this community. As a result, most of our people have been displaced and now living in Internally Displaced Person Camps (Field Report, 2022).

The above submission is supported by Mosadomi (2021), who argues that farmers cannot fully engage in farming due to banditry in Niger State. Since 2019, most of the farmers in Niger State have been displaced and can no longer farm full-time. This has harmed food production and prices. In addition, these bandits stole part of the crops harvested between 2019 and 2020 and the rest were burnt. Consequently, food prices have increased in Niger State and throughout the country due to these recent developments (Mosadomi, 2021).

The banditry attacks in Niger state have forced many residents to desert their genealogical homes and seek refuge in different Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps found in six distinctive places over the three local government areas of the State (Mosadomi, 2021). Concurring to insights given in 2020, no less than 3600 people, including men, women, and children, have been forced to relocate from their homes to camps at primary schools in Kuta and Zumba in Shiroro local government area and Bosso and Kagara in the Bosso and Kagara local government areas of the State (Mosadomi, 2021). As the assault continues, the number of people in the camp continues to grow. There are a lot of IDP camps in Kuta, the headquarters of the Shiroro local government. The Camp in Kuta has the highest number of IDPs, with over 3,000 people. The Bosso primary school camp accommodates over 2,500 people. The other IDP camps in Zumba, Kagara, and Erena towns each have fewer than 2,000 people (Mosadomi, 2021). Also, between 2020 and 2021, 151380 people were displaced by bandits. Most of these people were peasant farmers. The displaced persons were registered in 13 different local government areas in the State, with the Rafi council area near Zamfara State topping the list with 28,988 displaced persons (Maishanu, 2022; Umoru, 2022). In 2019, November an estimated 4,000 people were displaced within Shiroro Local Government Area in Niger State alone (The Guardian, 2019, November 26).

A reporter, Asishana, visited Munya, one of the most affected local government areas in Niger State, on 2021, May 4. She reported on the predicament of its inhabitants, who are under the control of bandits. According to Asishana, (2021) before the banditry attacks, Munya Local Government Area was one of the top producers of yam, corn, and rice in the State and its markets had been profoundly patronized some time ago before the upsurge of banditry assaults. Presently, most farmers no longer have farm produce to sell as the markets are no longer full like before. Minna, the state capital, is where others must take their produce to sell (Asishana, 2021). A woman farmer recalled that people used to come to their farms to buy crops even before they were harvested, but it had become difficult to get a buyer as everyone cited insecurity as the reason they could not go to Munya anymore (Asishana, 2021). For instance, the woman farmer told Asishana (2021) about the difficulty in selling her crops. She said:

She had to take her goods to Minna because people refused to come here because of the security situation. The sales of our goods have been affected by this. Sometimes getting transportation to Minna, the state capital, is a problem because some of the vehicles will refuse to carry your goods or they will charge extravagant fees (Asishana, 2021).

Numerous families in the affected areas are presently insolvent as they have had to sell their farm produce, lands, and other forms

of property to pay for their abducted loved ones (Asishana, 2021). The frequency of kidnapping incidents in this area has caused people to stop asking when the next one will occur and instead focus on who would be the victim. It has been reported that the residents have now made concerted efforts to donate money to anyone whose family member has been abducted. According to the youth leader, as captured by Asishana (2021) said:

If they kidnap anyone, we contribute money for those kidnapped to enable their families to pay for their ransoms and secure their release. If I do not do it, no one will join hands to help me when it is my turn. I must help others so that when it is my turn, they will help me. The bandits do not usually demand a small amount of money for ransom. You don't usually hear about small amounts but large ones between N1 and N5 million naira. Just one family cannot pay for it. A lot of people don't have any farm produce anymore because they sell them to raise ransoms (Asishana, 2021).

Another woman recounted how she was forced to sell everything she owned to pay for her daughter and son's release after being kidnapped by bandits holding a large part of Niger State hostage (Asishana, 2021). According to her, as captured by Asishana (2021):

They have finished me as I am now. I have sold all my farm produce and I have loans to pay because I had to borrow money to pay the ransom for my children abducted by bandits. Now I have absolutely nothing left. My son was kidnapped when he was returning from school, and we were asked to pay N1 million to rescue him. What can I do? I had to pay because if I didn't, they would kill him. I sold my farm produce, added my salary to the proceeds, and also obtained a loan to raise the sum demanded as ransom. My daughter was also kidnapped. But that happened before they kidnapped my son. We also had to pay a ransom to rescue her. Right now, I don't have anything left. It has not been easy for us in Munya (Asishana, 2021).

Again, according to the report as captured by Asishana (2021), the Vice-Chairman of Munya Local Government Area was not exempted from the torment of banditry in Niger State. According to him:

Two months ago, I lost my younger brother to bandits. My younger brother was a member of the local vigilantes in Kachu village and was killed during an ambush. Because of persistent attacks by bandits, people in the communities are currently running away from their homes and either entering Sarkin Pawa, Gwada, and Kuta or running to Minna, Niger State capital, for safety (Asishana, 2021).

In concurrence with the effects of banditry as adduced by the respondents and reports, Umoru (2022) asserted that attacks by bandits across communities in Niger state have resulted in killings, abductions, homelessness, and displacement of many residents in the rural areas of the State. Despite repeated assurances from the government, attacks by bandits have continued in Niger State (Umoru, 2022). Similarly, Usman & Singh (2021) stressed that banditry has led to deaths, displacements, and the disruption of both individual livelihood and the broader economy of most affected areas and localities in Niger state.

Apart from the fatalities recorded, the increase in banditry within communities harms social safety, discourages investment, and exacerbates socioeconomic problems for individuals and communities. This has a particularly damaging effect on national security which has to do with the security of lives and property of the citizens as well as the guarantee of citizens' welfare through the provision of the basic needs of lives (Ojah, 2019; Osewa, 2022). The persistent attack by bandits is causing spillover effects on other neighboring communities and local government areas of Niger State and hindering inter-communal and inter-state trade (Ojah, 2019). There have been a lot of banditry attacks in the Munya Local Government Area, and the area has become a terror

zone for everyone to avoid. The bandits often attack villages, targeting people with reckless abandon and often leaving them injured or dead. The situation has caused significant disruptions to socioeconomic activities in the local government, as farmers are afraid to go to their farms for fear of being attacked. Vendors who used to go to the local government to buy agricultural products are no longer showing up, causing local government revenue generation to drop drastically (Asishana, 2021).

Large-scale farming and animal husbandry have been acknowledged to be the main economic activities in the North with trading as an alternative source of income (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Most farmers cultivate rice and yam in Niger State. However, targeted attacks on farmers throughout the year have made cultivation and harvest impossible (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Bandits have ordered farmers to stay away from their farms and those who ignored the order have been kidnapped. Thus, farmers have been kidnapped for ransom, while bandits in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state have demanded payments of up to \$1,100 before farmers can access their farmlands (Muhammed, 2020). In addition, cattle rustling have harmed animal husbandry in these areas. Food insecurity is a major problem for displaced and non-displaced populations because they can no longer produce their food. This is because violence and displacement have left these communities without their usual sources of food (Anka, 2017).

Generally, the effect of banditry, particularly in Niger state and Nigeria in general, is wide-ranging. Banditry has worsened the security crisis in Nigeria; it has amplified the rate of forced relocation, looting and burning of houses, displacement, humanitarian crises, health challenges, food insecurity, cattle rustling, destruction of property, and death. For example, between 2018 and 2020, an estimated 4,900 people were killed in bandit attacks, while 309,000 internally displaced persons and 60,000 refugees were recorded (ACAPS, 2020; Akinyetun, 2022).

Ways of Tackling the Rising Banditry in Niger State

Regarding addressing the scourge of banditry in Niger State, the respondents had a different view on how the rising banditry can be tackled, particularly in the Niger State of Nigeria. For instance, one of the respondents, a community leader, queried the essence of border security. According to him:

Most of these bandits terrorizing villages and communities are foreign Fulanis from neighboring countries, especially the Niger Republic. To end banditry, the security agents manning the borders should stop them from entering the country. The security agents at the borders should sincerely end the illicit movement of foreign bandits across the borders into Nigeria. They have to be seriously checkmated (Field Report, 2022).

Another respondent, who is a security agent, lamented that they were overstretched in securing the communities affected by banditry in Niger state. An excerpt from him:

We don't have adequate personnel here to confront these bandits that usually unleash attacks in bands of hundred or thereabout and most of them carry sophisticated weapons. To arrest the situation here, more personnel should be deployed. Apart from the deployment of more security personnel, we need superior weapons to repel bandit attacks. More so, our welfare must be properly handled to boost our morale in this battle (Field Report, 2022).

In all, the respondents suggested different measures to curb banditry, such as the security system needs to be revived, the personnel should be adequately deployed to the interior villages and forest reserves that serve as hideouts for bandits, the government should drastically tackle the twin challenge of unemployment and poverty which breeds crime and have contributed to the rising wave of banditry; government should checkmate the influx of arms and foreign bandits into the country and government should put a stop to illegal mining activities (Field Report, 2022).

In a line from the above measures, Hamza (2021) averred that the level of banditry in Niger State is a complex and multifaceted trend that calls for a multi-dimensional process to curb. He emphasized that the challenges of banditry and general insecurity must be tackled from the root causes. In the same vein, Muhammad (2021) lamented that the government's current strategy of fighting banditry in the northern region of Nigeria would be difficult to resolve if the government did not consider the various factors involved in the conflict. To him, Nigeria's volatile population growth and climate change are contributing to economic apprehension and fueling a lack of control, especially in communities bordering Niger Republic (Mohammed, 2021). Furthermore, the border crossing between herder tribes is unrestricted, which can lead to problems. Anyone in the Niger Republic can come to Nigeria and commit any crime without fear of retribution in their home country (Mohammed, 2021). Moreover, corruption is a big drawback in border security as some security agencies collect bribes from Nigeriens and grant them access to the country without a proper investigation (Mohammed, 2021).

To Freilich & Newman (2017) and Akinyetun (2022), curbing or reducing banditry in Nigeria requires increased anti-crime efforts, which include making the target more difficult to exploit by encouraging community policing, managing access to facilities through controlling transhumance activities, deflecting offenders by reducing the porousness of borders, and punishing illicit arms dealers. Other measures to curb banditry, as suggested by Akinyetun (2022), include:

1. Increased government presence in vast under-governed spaces, assisting natural surveillance through improved security and reducing anonymity by identifying offenders and banditry sponsors.
2. Strengthening formal surveillance through the deployment of forest guards and the use of drones to monitor forest activities.
3. Discouraging illicit gold mining; converting the vast forests for government use; identifying property, for example, by branding cattle to reduce cattle rustling; disrupting markets by monitoring illicit trade hotspots; and denying benefits by desisting from paying ransoms to bandits for the release of kidnapping victims.
4. Enact policies and programs that reduce poverty, marginalization, and unemployment.
5. The control of violent attacks and management of disputes, particularly between herders and farmers; arresting and prosecuting offenders; and responding swiftly to distress calls.
6. Granting licenses for mining activities, appealing to individuals' conscience through messages such as 'crime does not pay'; and discouraging drug abuse among youths.
7. Reform the security apparatus with an emphasis on increasing security forces' size, funding, training, intelligence, support, and communication equipment.
8. Reduce or prevent the situational actions that motivate crime (banditry) and encourage the adoption of a situation-based prevention strategy.
9. Establish the presence of government and make use of effective leadership in poorly governed spaces in the country (Akinyetun, 2022).

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the socio-political and economic dimensions of the effect of rising banditry in Niger state with a view of proffering sustainable remedies to the scourge of banditry in Niger state in particular and Nigeria in general. Most of the responses generated from key persons' interviews are in concurrence with the views expressed by scholars from the secondary data on the drivers of rising banditry in Niger state, the effects of banditry, and ways of tackling banditry in Niger state. Apparently, the scourge of banditry has expanded into transnational crime. Hence, a holistic national and international solution is needed to end it. Therefore, there should be political will and concerted efforts among the governments of Nigeria (federal, state, and local governments) to put an end to banditry in Nigeria.

Also, the federal government should collaborate with the governments of the neighboring countries to ensure that foreign bandits are curtailed from infiltrating the country.

Furthermore, there is a correlation between insecurity and joblessness among the (youths) young persons, therefore the government should design programs to eliminate poverty and create jobs. Also, the ungoverned spaces and forests where the bandits operate need to be combed. Therefore, the Federal Government should increase, maintain and sustain military operations in the affected localities in Niger State to comb the forests from inhabiting bandits. Moreover, borders are very important to national security. Therefore, Nigerian porous borders should be blocked to prevent the influx of foreign criminal elements and the migration of foreign bandits into the country. Lastly, there is the need to revive community policing. Community police should be established, trained, and equipped with security tools to secure their communities against banditry. And more security personnel should be deployed to rural communities that are mostly affected by the activity of bandits to enforce law and order and reduce the scourge of banditry in the rural areas of Niger State.

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