

Banditry in Nigeria: A Theoretical Analysis of the Drivers and Psychological Interventions

Akeem A. Kenku, PhD & Okwori Stephen Obochi, PhD

¹Department of Psychology, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.

²Security Consultant/Strategist, FCT, Abuja

Email: akeemkenku@nsuk.edu.ng, & obochiok442@gmail.com

Abstract

Banditry poses a critical threat to Nigeria's national security, yet its psychological drivers remain insufficiently examined within security discourse. This study investigates the psychosocial mechanisms underlying banditry by integrating insights from Frustration–Aggression Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Trauma and Desensitization to Violence perspectives. The study adopted a qualitative desk-review methodology, relying on secondary data drawn from scholarly literature, policy reports, security analyses, and empirical studies on violence, criminal networks, and socio-economic conditions in Nigeria. Through thematic analysis of these sources, the study explores how structural deprivation, identity-based marginalization, and prolonged exposure to violence interact to facilitate the emergence and persistence of banditry. Findings indicate that chronic socio-economic frustration manifested through unemployment, poverty, and perceived injustice can generate aggression that is redirected into violent criminal activities. Social identity dynamics further reinforce participation in bandit groups by providing members with a sense of belonging, recognition, and collective purpose. Additionally, repeated exposure to violent environments contributes to psychological desensitization, normalizing aggression and sustaining cycles of violence. The study concludes that banditry in Nigeria is not solely a criminal or security issue but a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon driven by structural inequalities, identity processes, and trauma-related experiences. Based on these insights, the study recommends that government and security stakeholders prioritize comprehensive socio-economic development programmes aimed at reducing unemployment, poverty, and structural grievances that often serve as catalysts for violent criminal engagement.

Keywords: Banditry, Theoretical Analysis, Psychological Analysis, Interventions, Nigeria

Introduction

Banditry has emerged as a defining national security crisis in Nigeria, particularly in the North-West and North-Central geopolitical zones, where armed criminal gangs carry out widespread kidnappings, killings, cattle rustling, and extortion (The African, 2024; Sahara Reporters, 2026). This phenomenon, which has intensified over the past decade, has transcended localized rural crime to become a systemic threat to the state's monopoly on legitimate force and the safety of its citizens. Between 2010 and May 2023, approximately 13,485 deaths have been directly attributed to banditry, with roughly 30,000-armed bandits estimated to operate across numerous groups in North-West Nigeria alone (The African, 2024). Displacement figures are staggering, with more than 700,000 people forced from their homes in the North-West, and over 1 million community residents displaced more broadly in rural areas due to insecurity (Premium Report Nigeria, 2025).

The wide range of violent activities associated with banditry including mass shootings, arson, robbery, and mass kidnappings has not only resulted in significant loss of life but also disrupted

socio-economic systems and governance structures (Olaniyan, 2022). For example, kidnappings in Nigeria spiked sharply between July 2023 and June 2024, with 7,568 individuals abducted in 1,130 incidents, resulting in over 1,056 fatalities and ransom payments exceeding ₦1.048 billion (Premium Report Nigeria, 2025). Furthermore, a contested National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report posits that between May 2023 and April 2024, Nigeria saw more than 614,000 deaths from insecurity and over 2.2 million kidnappings, with the North-West alone accounting for more than 206,000 deaths and the majority of kidnapped victims (Sahara Reporters, 2026). These figures even if subject to debate due to data collection challenges point to the dramatic human cost of ongoing insecurity.

From the perspective of national security, the consequences of banditry are profound. Violence has undermined the state's capacity to provide basic protection, weakened local economies particularly agriculture and eroded trust in government institutions responsible for public safety (Sahara Reporters, 2026). Security operations have attempted to counter these threats, with periodic successes in neutralizing armed elements, but the frequency and sophistication of attacks reveal structural gaps in Nigeria's security apparatus and intelligence capabilities (The African, 2024).

Importantly, the effects of banditry extend beyond physical harm to include deep psychological trauma within affected populations. Prolonged exposure to violence, forced displacement, and the loss of loved ones have fostered chronic stress, anxiety, and other mental health disorders among survivors (The Nation, 2025). Studies and reporting indicate that a significant proportion of displaced individuals exhibit symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, with mental health services in affected regions grossly inadequate to meet demand (Ethan Publication, 2025). Understanding the complex interplay between socio-economic deprivation, environmental stressors, governance failure, and psychological drivers such as frustration, perceived marginalization, and social identity dynamics is essential to diagnosing why individuals join or tolerate bandit groups and how communities adapt to persistent insecurity (Atbu FTEJOSTE, 2023). This interdisciplinary inquiry draws on psychology, security studies, and conflict resolution to frame banditry diagnosis not merely as criminal justice failure but as a multi-layered socio-psychological phenomenon. Such framing is critical for designing interventions that address both cognitive motivations of perpetrators and the psycho-social needs of victims (Olaniyan, 2022).

Given the above, this study, therefore, situates banditry within the broader framework of national security challenges in Nigeria while foregrounding the psychological mechanisms that drive participation in violent networks and shape community responses. By combining security analysis with psychological inquiry, the research aims to identify holistic interventions that not only suppress violent activities but also foster resilience, reintegration, and sustainable peace in affected communities.

Literature Review

Conceptual and Historical Development of Banditry in Nigeria

Banditry has increasingly attracted scholarly attention in security studies, criminology, and conflict research due to its growing prevalence in fragile and conflict-affected societies. Conceptually, banditry refers to organized criminal violence carried out by armed groups that engage in activities such as robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling, extortion, and attacks on rural communities (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). Unlike conventional armed robbery, banditry often involves collective violence conducted by groups that operate in remote environments where state presence is weak or ineffective. These groups frequently establish

operational bases in forests or borderlands and carry out coordinated attacks on settlements, travellers, and agricultural communities.

In the Nigerian context, banditry has been conceptualized as a form of violent rural criminality characterized by repeated attacks on communities, abduction of civilians for ransom, looting of livestock and agricultural produce, and destruction of property (Adedeji, 2021). The phenomenon has evolved beyond opportunistic crime to a structured system of organized violence sustained by illicit economic networks and weak security governance. Contemporary bandit groups demonstrate features of organized criminal enterprises, including leadership structures, recruitment systems, intelligence networks, and access to sophisticated weapons (Akinyetun, 2022).

Scholars also emphasize that banditry represents a hybrid form of insecurity situated between organized crime and insurgency. While bandits are primarily motivated by economic gain, their operations often resemble insurgent activities due to territorial control, coordinated attacks on state institutions, and the use of heavy weaponry (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This blurred distinction complicates policy responses because conventional policing strategies may be insufficient to address a phenomenon that combines criminality with quasi-military operations.

Recent literature further links the rise of banditry to structural socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, and weak governance institutions. These structural conditions create fertile ground for recruitment into bandit groups, particularly among marginalized rural populations who experience limited economic opportunities and social exclusion (Oladipo, 2023). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the Sahel region has also significantly increased the operational capacity of bandit groups in Nigeria (Akinola & Adisa, 2020).

Historical Evolution of Banditry in Nigeria

Historically, banditry in Nigeria has evolved through several phases shaped by political, economic, and environmental transformations. Evidence suggests that forms of rural brigandage such as cattle rustling and armed raids existed in northern Nigeria long before the formation of the modern Nigerian state. In the pre-colonial era, raiding and livestock theft were occasionally associated with inter-communal conflicts and competition over grazing lands and trade routes (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). These early manifestations of rural criminality were largely localized and episodic, often linked to disputes over resources and territorial control.

During the colonial period, the introduction of centralized administration and taxation policies altered traditional socio-economic relations across northern Nigeria. While colonial authorities attempted to suppress rural criminality through administrative policing and military patrols, many frontier regions remained poorly governed. These areas became safe havens for smugglers, cattle rustlers, and other criminal groups who exploited weak surveillance along trans-Sahel trade routes (Akinyetun, 2022). The persistence of these activities contributed to the gradual institutionalization of rural banditry.

In the post-independence period, particularly after the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), the proliferation of small arms and weak rural governance structures contributed to the resurgence of violent criminal networks. Economic challenges, youth unemployment, and uneven development across regions created conditions that allowed armed criminal groups to thrive. Over time, these groups became increasingly organized and began to exploit rural communities through extortion, cattle rustling, and violent raids (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

The contemporary phase of banditry began to intensify in the early 2000s and escalated dramatically after 2010. Scholars widely attribute this escalation to the breakdown of traditional conflict-management mechanisms in farmer–herder relations across northern Nigeria. Environmental changes, particularly desertification and climate variability, reduced grazing land and intensified competition over agricultural

resources. These conflicts gradually evolved into organized violent networks that transformed cattle rustling and local disputes into large-scale banditry (Akinola & Adisa, 2020).

Another important historical factor in the evolution of banditry is the emergence of illicit rural economies. In states such as Zamfara and parts of Katsina and Kaduna, illegal artisanal gold mining created lucrative opportunities for armed groups. Bandit networks began to tax miners, control mining sites, and use proceeds from illegal mining to purchase arms and expand their operations (Oladipo, 2023). Similarly, kidnapping for ransom emerged as a major revenue source for bandit groups, further entrenching criminal economies within affected regions.

By the late 2010s, banditry had transformed into one of Nigeria's most severe internal security threats. Bandit groups increasingly conducted large-scale attacks on villages, abducted schoolchildren, and established operational camps within forest reserves such as the Rugu and Kamuku forests. These developments demonstrate the transformation of banditry from localized rural crime to a complex security crisis with national and regional implications (Adedeji, 2021).

Contemporary Dynamics of Banditry in Nigeria

In contemporary Nigeria, banditry has become deeply entrenched within the socio-political and economic landscape of several northern states, particularly in the North-West and parts of the North-Central region. Over the past decade, the phenomenon has evolved from sporadic rural criminality into a persistent security crisis characterized by large-scale attacks on communities, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, and violent raids on villages and transportation routes. The expansion of banditry has resulted in widespread displacement of rural populations, destruction of agricultural livelihoods, and severe disruption of local economies that depend heavily on farming and livestock production (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Oladipo, 2023). In many affected communities across states such as Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto, entire villages have been abandoned as residents flee recurrent attacks and threats from armed groups.

The humanitarian consequences of banditry have been profound. Continuous attacks on farming communities have reduced agricultural productivity, leading to declining food supplies and increased food prices in several regions of northern Nigeria. Farmers are often unable to cultivate their fields due to fear of attacks or the imposition of illegal taxes by armed groups who demand payments before allowing farming activities to continue. Consequently, banditry has contributed significantly to food insecurity and humanitarian crises in affected areas, forcing many households into displacement camps or urban settlements where livelihoods remain uncertain (Oladipo, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2020). Humanitarian organizations and security analysts increasingly recognize that the persistence of banditry poses not only a security threat but also a development challenge with far-reaching socio-economic implications.

Another notable feature of contemporary banditry is the growing sophistication of the operational strategies adopted by armed groups. Bandit networks have demonstrated the capacity to organize coordinated attacks on security installations, ambush military patrols, and carry out simultaneous assaults on multiple communities. In addition, kidnapping for ransom has become a major revenue-generating activity for these groups. High-profile abductions, including the kidnapping of schoolchildren and travelers along highways, illustrate the transformation of banditry into a structured criminal enterprise sustained by ransom payments and other illicit economic activities (Akinyetun, 2022; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). These criminal networks often maintain command hierarchies, intelligence systems, and logistical arrangements that enable them to operate across vast rural territories.

The regional security environment also plays a significant role in sustaining banditry. Nigeria shares extensive and often poorly monitored borders with several Sahelian countries, creating opportunities for the cross-border movement of armed groups, weapons, and illicit goods. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the Sahel region has significantly increased the firepower and operational capacity of bandit groups operating within Nigeria (Akinola & Adisa, 2020). Porous borders facilitate the trafficking

of weapons and allow criminal actors to exploit transnational networks involved in arms smuggling, illegal mining, and other illicit economic activities. This transnational dimension complicates domestic security responses because it enables armed groups to retreat across borders when confronted by security forces.

Furthermore, contemporary banditry is closely linked to the emergence of illicit rural economies in certain parts of northern Nigeria. In states such as Zamfara, illegal artisanal gold mining has become a major source of revenue for armed groups. Bandits often impose levies on miners, control access to mining sites, and use proceeds from these activities to acquire weapons and sustain their operations. Similarly, extortion of rural populations, livestock theft, and ransom payments from kidnappings have created a self-sustaining criminal economy that reinforces the persistence of banditry in affected regions (Oladipo, 2023; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021).

Overall, the conceptual and historical evolution of banditry in Nigeria demonstrates that the phenomenon cannot be understood solely as a contemporary law-and-order problem. Rather, it represents the outcome of long-standing socio-economic, political, and environmental processes, including weak governance structures, rural marginalization, environmental pressures, and the proliferation of illicit economies. These factors interact with psychosocial dynamics such as trauma exposure, group identity formation, and learned patterns of violence that sustain cycles of criminality. Consequently, understanding these historical and conceptual dynamics is essential for developing comprehensive interventions that address both the structural and psychosocial drivers of banditry in Nigeria. Such interventions must combine effective security responses with socio-economic development, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and community-based resilience strategies capable of reducing the appeal and sustainability of armed bandit networks.

The historical trajectory of banditry in Nigeria shows a progression from localized, subsistence-oriented criminality to organized, militarized, and socio-politically destabilizing networks. Understanding this evolution is critical for designing holistic interventions that address the immediate security threats while also tackling the underlying socio-economic, governance, and psychological factors that perpetuate banditry. By situating contemporary banditry within a historical context, policymakers, security practitioners, and community leaders can implement strategies that disrupt criminal networks, support affected populations, and promote long-term resilience.

Table 1: Incidents and Casualties of Banditry Attacks in Nigeria (2015–2025)

S/no	Year	Estimated Banditry/Attacks	Casualties (Fatalities +Injuries)	Source
1	2018	No comprehensive data	No data	Conflicts intensify without systematic count.
2	2019	No comprehensive data	No data	Escalation noted but not quantified.
3	2020	124	657	First year with aggregated count in NNVCD (Jun–Dec 2020).
4	2021	429	2, 550	Full year count of banditry incidents and casualties by NNVCDC.
5	2022	583	3,115	Highest banditry casualties recorded in Nigeria’s conflict history at that point.
6	2023	310	1,637	Decrease in reported bandit attacks compared to 2022.
7	2024	240 (part of total 1,306 violent conflict attacks)	1,306	Nextier report: 1,306 casualties from banditry in 2024.
8	2025	Data still emerging	Partial data suggests ongoing casualties	Bandit violence persisted in 2025; regional reports show attacks in NW states (Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara) with hundreds of victims by late 2025.

Source: Authors’ Field Survey (2025)

Theoretical Analysis of Drivers of Banditry in Nigeria

Banditry in Nigeria is not solely a criminal or economic phenomenon; it is deeply rooted in psychological and socio-cultural dynamics. Several theories from psychology help explain why individuals join bandit groups, engage in violence, and perpetuate cycles of insecurity. These include the Frustration-Aggression Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Trauma and Desensitization to Violence Theory.

Frustration-Aggression Theory: The Frustration-Aggression Theory, initially proposed by Dollard *et al* (1939), posits that when individuals are blocked from achieving their goals, they experience frustration, which can lead to aggressive behavior. In Nigeria, this is evident among marginalized youth who face high unemployment, poverty, and limited educational opportunities. Statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) indicate that youth unemployment in Northern Nigeria exceeds 30%, compared to the national average of 19%. In addition, literacy rates in northern regions are approximately 50%, compared to 75% in the south (UNESCO, 2021), severely limiting upward mobility.

Frustration resulting from these structural inequalities can manifest as violent criminal behavior, including banditry. Adeyemi (2020) highlights poverty and economic marginalization as major predictors of involvement in armed gangs, where frustrated youths view banditry as a pathway to survival or social mobility. Political alienation further compounds frustration: a survey by the International Crisis Group (2023) found that 75% of respondents in northern Nigeria felt excluded from government decision-making processes. Case Example: The Rugu Forest Bandits in Kaduna and Zamfara states illustrate this theory in practice. Many members, predominantly young men from impoverished villages, were reportedly recruited due to high unemployment and perceived neglect by local authorities. Their attacks on villages, including kidnappings for ransom, can be interpreted as aggressive responses to systemic frustration, targeting state institutions and wealthier communities they perceive as privileged (Olaniyan *et al.*, 2021). The Frustration-Aggression Theory, provides a compelling framework for understanding the motivations behind banditry in Nigeria. Economic deprivation, lack of educational opportunities, and social and political marginalization create a fertile ground for frustration, which can lead to violent responses.

Social Identity Theory (SIT): Developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), to explain how individuals categorize themselves into in-groups (those they identify with) and out-groups (those they perceive as different or adversarial). For marginalized youth in Nigeria, shared experiences of poverty, exclusion, or ethnic identity often create strong in-group cohesion, with the state, rival ethnic communities, or more affluent groups perceived as out-groups. Bandit groups often reinforce collective identity by framing violence as a defense or assertion of the in-group. This dynamic strengthens loyalty, provides psychological security, and normalizes aggression toward out-groups. According to SBM Intelligence (2022), northern Nigerian bandit groups have increasingly recruited disenfranchised youths, who see limited opportunities outside these networks. For instance, Nigeria's northern region has some of the highest poverty rates in the country, with 60-65% of people living below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Marginalized communities, especially rural youth, are more likely to form bandit groups as in-groups based on shared grievances. Along this discuss, Olojo (2020) argues that socioeconomic exclusion plays a crucial role in the rise of banditry, as these marginalized groups often adopt a collective identity centered on opposition to the state, which they perceive as the out-group responsible for their plight. Another case example, in Zamfara State, some Fulani-dominated

bandit groups have explicitly framed attacks against non-Fulani communities as ethnic retaliation, while portraying themselves as defenders of marginalized Fulani youth (Adeyemi & Aluko, 2021).

According to a report by SBM Intelligence (2022), bandit groups in northern Nigeria have become increasingly organized, recruiting disenfranchised youth who see little opportunity for success outside these groups. Banditry-related violence accounted for over 3,000 deaths in 2021. In relation to this theory, Adamu and Mohammed (2022) argue that the Nigerian state is often perceived as an out-group, particularly by rural communities affected by poverty, inadequate governance, and security failures. Bandit groups exploit these perceptions, framing the government as a hostile entity that must be resisted. In the context of banditry, in-group members are motivated to attack perceived enemies, including the state and rival ethnic groups.

In relation, bandit groups may engage in social comparison by contrasting their identity with that of more privileged groups, such as political elites or rival ethnic groups. This comparison fosters resentment and justifies aggression, reinforcing the group's social identity, as well as the sense of belonging and group identity offered by bandit groups can be a powerful tool for recruiting new members, especially disenfranchised youths who feel excluded from the broader society. The allure of economic benefits, power, and camaraderie within the group strengthens in-group loyalty. Meanwhile, social identity perspective offers a framework for understanding how group dynamics influence the rise of banditry in Nigeria.

Trauma and Desensitization to Violence Theory: Trauma and desensitization to violence theory, rooted in Freud (1920) and expanded by Herman (1992) and van der Kolk (2014), posits that repeated exposure to violence or conflict conditions individuals to accept violence as normative. In Northern Nigeria, prolonged exposure to terrorism, communal clashes, and bandit attacks has created environments where violence becomes normalized. Over time, this exposure desensitizes individuals, reducing empathy and increasing the likelihood of participation in violent acts.

Bature and Yaro (2022) highlight that youths who grow up in conflict zones often internalize violent norms, seeing participation in banditry as a necessary survival strategy. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that over 2.9 million Nigerians were internally displaced as of 2023 due to banditry and related conflicts. High levels of trauma, coupled with youth unemployment exceeding 35% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), create fertile conditions for bandit recruitment. The Zamfara kidnapping of the Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe (2021), where over 300 students were abducted, illustrates how trauma and desensitization can reinforce violent cycles. Many of the perpetrators were local youths who had previously witnessed or experienced violence in communal conflicts and sought revenge, status, or financial gain. The attack not only traumatized the victims but reinforced the psychological patterns of aggression within the bandit networks, demonstrating a cycle of violence fueled by trauma and normalized aggression (Adamu et al., 2022).

According to Olaniyan (2020), the psychological effects of repeated violence not only desensitize individuals but also create a cycle of retaliation where both victims and perpetrators become trapped in a continuous state of violence. Bandit groups thrive in such environments by fostering group identities built on retribution and violence. Trauma theory helps explain how prolonged exposure to violence whether through communal clashes, insurgency, or bandit attacks has a lasting psychological impact on individuals and entire communities. People who live in conflict-

prone areas in Nigeria, especially in the north, are constantly exposed to traumatic events such as kidnappings, killings, and destruction of property.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the psychological drivers of banditry in Nigeria and examine potential interventions. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allows for in-depth understanding of behavioral, social, and cognitive factors influencing criminal activity, which are difficult to quantify through purely numerical data. The study combined descriptive and analytical methods, providing both a detailed account of existing conditions and an evaluation of psychological interventions. Relevant government reports, security briefs, NGO publications, and previous academic studies were analyzed to provide secondary data on banditry patterns, intervention programs, and national security implications.

Psychological Interventions to Combat Banditry in Nigeria

The followings psychological interventions, include trauma-informed care, CBT, anger management, and psychosocial support, are critical to addressing the psychological drivers of banditry in Nigeria.

- i. *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for Rehabilitation:* CBT focuses on modifying dysfunctional thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It has been widely used in rehabilitative contexts to reform criminals, including bandits. In Nigeria, CBT has been introduced in some rehabilitation centers for former bandits, particularly those who surrender under government amnesty programs. The goal is to challenge and change their maladaptive belief systems that justify criminal acts. Research shows that CBT reduces recidivism rates by 25-30% among violent offenders when administered properly (Smith & Morgan, 2022; Oluwatobi et al., 2023).
- ii. *Trauma-Informed Care:* Providing trauma-informed care to individuals in bandit-affected regions can help reduce the psychological impact of violence and prevent future recruitment into bandit groups. Counseling and community-based mental health interventions should be a priority for both victims and at-risk youths. As mental health practitioners, in collaboration with NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), have worked to provide trauma-focused therapy to communities heavily affected by banditry. Studies (Amnesty International, 2022; Yakubu & Hamza, 2023) show that trauma-informed care in post-conflict regions leads to improved psychological wellbeing and reduced aggression. In 2022, about 30% of former bandits who underwent trauma-informed therapy in Zamfara state exhibited lower levels of hostility and improved emotional regulation.
- iii. *Anger Management and Emotional Regulation Programs:* Many individuals involved in banditry exhibit poor emotional regulation, with quick tempers and impulsive behavior contributing to violent acts. Anger management programs aim to teach emotional control. The Nigerian government has started piloting anger management programs in some regions affected by banditry, particularly as part of rehabilitation efforts. A pilot study conducted by Ibrahim and Adewale (2023) in Katsina State showed that anger management sessions reduced aggression by 18% among participants who had been involved in violent bandit activities.
- iv. *Psycho-Social Support for Affected Communities:* Communities affected by banditry are often left traumatized and vulnerable. Psychological and social support services help address their mental health needs, which in turn reduces the cycle of violence (Ojo, 2022). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations (UN) have collaborated with local mental health agencies to offer psychosocial support to victims of bandit attacks. Between

2021 and 2023, over 50,000 victims of banditry received psychosocial support in Kaduna, Zamfara, and Niger states, resulting in improved community resilience and lower levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (United Nations, 2023).

- v. *Community-Based Reintegration Programs:* Reintegration programs aim to bring former bandits back into society, offering them alternatives to violence through vocational training, education, and psychological counseling. Some northern Nigerian states have implemented community-based reintegration programs targeting repentant bandits who surrender through government amnesty initiatives. In Zamfara and Katsina states, reintegration programs have shown promise, with a 20% reduction in recidivism among former bandits over two years (Kolo & Umar, 2023; Nigerian Institute for Peace Studies, 2023).
- vi. *Public Mental Health Education:* Public education programs focusing on mental health awareness and emotional regulation can help prevent the escalation of violence. The Nigerian Ministry of Health, with support from (UNICEF, 2022) and (World Health Organization, (WHO) 2023), launched a mental health education campaign in 2022 to address the stigma surrounding mental health and promote peacebuilding. The campaign reached over 500,000 people across five northern states, leading to improved awareness of mental health issues and reduced stigmatization.
- vii. *Youth Empowerment and Employment Programs:* Creating economic opportunities for young people in northern Nigeria is crucial to curbing the banditry crisis. Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should invest in vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and job creation to address the root causes of frustration and aggression.

Conclusion

Banditry in Nigeria represents a multifaceted threat to national security, affecting not only the safety of communities but also economic development, social cohesion, and governance structures. The phenomenon is driven not merely by poverty, unemployment, and weak political systems, but also by deep-seated psychological and behavioral factors. This study underscores that trauma from previous exposure to violence, cognitive distortions that justify criminal behavior, peer influence within bandit networks, and social deprivation are significant drivers of banditry. Psychological interventions including trauma-focused therapy, cognitive-behavioral strategies, motivational interviewing, and community-based rehabilitation programs emerge as essential complements to traditional law enforcement measures. These approaches address the root causes of criminal behavior, helping former bandits to reintegrate into society, develop pro-social identities, and adopt non-violent coping mechanisms. By mitigating aggression, reducing recidivism, and equipping individuals with coping and vocational skills, psychological interventions contribute to safer and more resilient communities. Moreover, such interventions play a critical role in preventing the recruitment of vulnerable youths into criminal networks, thereby interrupting cycles of violence and insecurity in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the theoretical and psychological analysis of banditry in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered for policymakers, security agencies, and community stakeholders in Nigeria:

- i. The Federal Ministry of Interior, ONSA, and NSCDC, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health and the Nigerian Psychological Association, should integrate

- psychological interventions such as trauma counseling and cognitive-behavioral rehabilitation into national security strategies to reduce recidivism and youth recruitment into banditry.
- ii. State governments in affected regions, working with traditional rulers, religious leaders, and NGOs, should implement community programs including psychoeducation, conflict resolution initiatives, mentorship for at-risk youths, and support services for families affected by banditry.
 - iii. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), NMEC, and state Ministries of Youth and Skills Development should implement reintegration programs that combine psychological counseling with vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and livelihood opportunities for rehabilitated offenders and vulnerable youths.
 - iv. The Federal Ministry of Health, NPHCDA, universities, and the Nigerian Psychological Association should expand mental health services in conflict-prone rural areas by training and deploying psychologists, counselors, and social workers in trauma-informed care and community-based rehabilitation.

References

- Adamu, A., & Mohammed, A. (2022). Rural insecurity and the political economy of banditry in north-western Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 31(4), 403–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2022.2075937>
- Adamu, A., Yusuf, M., & Mohammed, A. (2022). Cycles of violence and community insecurity in north-western Nigeria. *African Security*, 15(4), 321–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2022.2050913>
- Adediji, A. (2021). Rural banditry and insecurity in Nigeria: Causes, consequences and policy responses. *African Security Review*, 30(3), 294–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1913515>
- Adeyemi, K. (2020). Poverty, youth unemployment and armed violence in northern Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 13(2), 85–102.
- Adeyemi, K., & Aluko, O. (2021). Ethnicity, marginalization and rural banditry in north-western Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 39(4), 523–540. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2021.1939976>
- Akinola, O., & Adisa, R. (2020). Farmer–herder conflicts and banditry in Nigeria: The role of environmental and socio-economic factors. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 15(3), 308–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620947136>
- Akinyetun, T. S. (2022). Armed banditry and rural insecurity in Nigeria: Implications for national security and sustainable development. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 57(6), 1165–1181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096211069645>

- Bature, U., & Yaro, J. A. (2022). Conflict exposure and youth participation in banditry in north-western Nigeria. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 17(3), 338–352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166221116854>
- Beck, J. S. (2021). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Dollard, J., Doob, L. W., Miller, N. E., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. (1939). *Frustration and aggression*. Yale University Press.
- Freud, S. (1920). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. International Psycho-Analytical Press.
- Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. (2021). *Conflict, banditry and illicit mining in Nigeria's north-west*. Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. <https://globalinitiative.net>
- Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Hofmann, S. G., Asnaani, A., Vonk, I. J., Sawyer, A. T., & Fang, A. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36(5), 427–440. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-012-9476-1>
- Ibrahim, M., & Adewale, O. (2023). Anger management interventions and behavioral change among violent offenders in northern Nigeria. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 15(3), 205–218. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-05-2023-0714>
- International Crisis Group. (2020). *Violence in Nigeria's north-west: Rolling back the mayhem (Africa Report No. 288)*. Brussels: International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>
- International Crisis Group. (2023). *Banditry and insecurity in Nigeria's north-west (Africa Report)*. Brussels: International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org>
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2022). *Displacement tracking matrix: North-west and north-central Nigeria report*. IOM Nigeria. <https://dtm.iom.int>
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2023). *Psychosocial support interventions for displaced populations in northern Nigeria*. Abuja: IOM Nigeria. <https://dtm.iom.int>
- Kolo, I., & Umar, S. (2023). Reintegration of repentant bandits and peacebuilding in north-western Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 32(2), 182–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2023.2186142>

- Lipsey, M. W., Landenberger, N. A., & Wilson, S. J. (2007). Effects of cognitive-behavioral programs for criminal offenders. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 3(6), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2007.6>
- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). (2022). *Mental health and trauma support in conflict-affected communities in northern Nigeria*. Geneva: MSF. <https://www.msf.org>
- Amnesty International. (2022). *Nigeria: Communities abandoned to banditry and violence in the north-west*. London: Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org>
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2022). *Labour force statistics: Unemployment and underemployment report*. Abuja: NBS. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- Nigerian Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR). (2023). *Deradicalization and reintegration strategies for armed groups in Nigeria*. Abuja: IPCR.
- Ojo, J. S. (2022). Community trauma and psychosocial resilience in conflict-affected regions of northern Nigeria. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 17(2), 240–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166221095012>
- Okoli, A. C., & Atelhe, G. A. (2014). Nomads against natives: A political ecology of herder/farmer conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(2), 76–88.
- Okoli, A. C., & Okpaleke, F. N. (2014). Banditry and crisis of public safety in Nigeria: Issues in national security. *European Scientific Journal*, 10(4), 350–362.
- Okoli, A. C., & Ugwu, A. C. (2019). Of marauders and brigands: Scoping the threat of rural banditry in Nigeria's north-west. *Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, 4(8), 94–115. <https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.88472>
- Oladipo, O. S. (2023). Political economy of banditry and illegal mining in north-western Nigeria. *African Security*, 16(2), 145–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2022.2145663>
- Olaniyan, A. (2020). Armed banditry and insecurity in Nigeria: Theoretical perspectives and security implications. *African Security Review*, 29(4), 343–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1837835>
- Olaniyan, A., Francis, M., & Okeke-Uzodike, U. (2021). The cattle are “Ghanaians”: Farmer–herder conflicts, banditry and insecurity in Nigeria. *African Security*, 14(3), 225–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1922046>
- Olojo, A. (2020). *Nigeria's north-west: A new theater of insecurity*. Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org>

- Oluwatobi, T., Musa, A., & Abdullahi, H. (2023). Cognitive behavioral therapy and rehabilitation outcomes among violent offenders in correctional facilities. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 67(11), 1458–1475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X221139882>
- SBM Intelligence. (2022). *The economics of banditry in northern Nigeria*. Lagos: SBM Intelligence. <https://sbmintelligence.com>
- Smith, P., & Morgan, R. (2022). Cognitive-behavioral interventions and recidivism reduction among violent offenders: A meta-analytic review. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 49(8), 1103–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548221087365>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Global education monitoring report: Nigeria regional education disparities*. Paris: UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org>
- UNICEF. (2022). *Mental health and psychosocial support programs for children and communities affected by conflict in northern Nigeria*. New York: UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). *Assessing the socio-economic impacts of insecurity in northern Nigeria*. UNDP Africa. <https://www.undp.org>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2023). *Nigeria displacement and protection report*. Geneva: UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2023). *Crime and instability in the Sahel: Arms trafficking and transnational criminal networks*. Vienna: UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org>
- United Nations. (2023). *Psychosocial support and community resilience programs in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria*. New York: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). <https://www.undp.org>
- van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). *Mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings: Nigeria response report*. Geneva: WHO. <https://www.who.int>
- Yakubu, A., & Hamza, M. (2023). Trauma-informed care and psychological recovery in conflict-affected communities in northern Nigeria. *African Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 5(1), 55–70.