

ISSUE AND DIMENSIONS OF BANDITRY AND SECURITY IN NIGER STATE

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Abstract

Banditry has emerged as a significant security challenge in Nigeria, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions. This article examines the origins, causes, and consequences of banditry, with a focus on Niger State. Utilizing the theory of social structure and anomie, it explores how socio-economic realities such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation have fueled criminal activities, including kidnapping, cattle rustling, and violent attacks. The paper also highlights the different types of conflicts violent and non-violent that contribute to insecurity, analyzing their implications for national development. Additionally, it discusses the role of illegal mining, pastoralist-farmer clashes, and weak security infrastructure in exacerbating the crisis. The study recommends a multi-faceted approach to tackling banditry, including improved security operations, community policing, surveillance technology, and legislative measures to curb arms proliferation. By addressing the socio-economic root causes, enhancing law enforcement, and fostering community resilience, sustainable security solutions can be achieved in Niger State and beyond.

Keywords: Banditry, Conflict Resolution, Insecurity, Niger State & Socio-Economic Factors

Introduction

The history of banditry in Nigeria can be traced specifically to the North-west region, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Zamfara states. It was caused by the farmers-herders clashes which later transformed into banditry. Several factors such as climatic change, non-agricultural use of land, the porous nature of Nigeria's border, underdelimited state borders, poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, as well as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, were responsible for the emergence and rise of banditry.

Nigeria's safety is consistently threatened by ongoing banditry that pose threat national security. This complex situation hinders growth and causes increase in crime rates. Insecurity is a complex issue that take on diverse forms in various geographical regions throughout the country. Cybercrime, armed robbery, kidnapping, domestic violence, extrajudicial killings, herder-farmer disputes, ritual killings, and banditry are all on the rise. Ritual killings, commercial crime, secessionist agitation, kidnappings, gunman attacks, and banditry are all common in many parts of Nigeria. Militancy, kidnapping, and environmental agitation continue to pose threats to the southern part of Nigeria. The Boko Haram insurgency and the Islamic State in West Africa Province are responsible for more than a ten-year-old humanitarian disaster that has affected the North East. While this is happening, banditry, ethno-religious murders, and illicit mining are also prevalent in the North West. It follows, therefore, that Nigeria's instability has taken on a disproportionate geopolitical role, costing thousands of lives as well as causing significant harm and loss of properties in the country.

With growing activity in the country's northwest, particularly in the states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina, banditry has recently come to be important security issue. A form of

organized crime known as banditry is defined as "a sort of kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources," (Brenner, 2021). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons, poor socioeconomic conditions like unemployment and poverty, cattle rustling, and illegal mining operations in the North West are some of the factors that have contributed to the rise and persistence of banditry in Nigeria (Brenner, 2021).

Although academic attention is starting to focus on Nigeria's banditry problem, theoretical exploration and investigations are still in their infancy. To fill the void and provide explanations for the presence of banditry in Nigeria, this article uses the theory of social structure and anomie to debunk this phenomenon. This is done bearing in mind that an understanding of the motivating factors of crime provides insights and potential solutions. Furthermore, the available literature largely fails to characterize the phenomenon adequately and tends to offer vague solutions. The article thus proposes practical solutions through the strategies of social structure and anomie. It also addresses the concept of insecurity and its causes and effects of banditry.

Conceptual Clarifications

Insecurity

According to Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpan Robaro (2013), insecurity refer to the absence of protection or safety. They claim that insecurity encompasses danger, a deathtrap, ambiguity, a lack of fortification, and a lack of security. Additionally, they include two key aspects in discussing insecurity. First, they argued that being predisposed to danger or the threat of danger is the state of being insecure. In this situation, the likelihood of suffering harm because of taking insufficient precautions against danger is very high. Second, insecurity is the condition of being exposed to risk or concern. This exposure could result from inadequate measures taken by the state or a group of people to combat insecurity. This typically occurs when law enforcement officers are undereducated, undertrained, underpaid, and unmotivated. It could also happen if people lack access to necessities for survival.

Similarly, Beland (2005) views the concept of insecurity as a state of fear or anxiety due to the absence of protection. Some see the concept as a state of not being secure in certain environments (Adegbami, 2013), while Ajodo-Adebanjo and Okorie (2014) view insecurity as a state of being subject to danger or threat. In this scenario, people's state of mind concerning safety could be categorized by self-doubt and defencelessness, and such persons could consider themselves targets for harm.

Formerly, the competition for weaponry and ammunition was primarily viewed as a means of defending the state against external assault as the problem of insecurity (Adebanjoko and Walter, 2014). After the war, as the number of rebels increased within nations, particularly in developing nations, the issue of insecurity became a central concern. Scholars now regard insecurity as a threat to human existence due to the current phenomena of non-violent conflicts inside the least developed countries (Saliu, Luqman & Abdullahi, 2007).

Banditry

Banditry is an act of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down. According to the Oxford dictionary, banditry refers to acts of stealing and violence by bandits. It usually refer to a group of individuals, who use weapon and rob peoples. Often this act is carried out in isolated area, where the long arms of the law and security are very low or perhaps non-existent.

Conflict

Conflicts are unhealthy competition for power, resources, and interests, which are rampant in various Nigerian communities. Conflict is a phenomenon known to human societies all over the world and is often accompanied by extreme acts of violence and terror. Hence, there are no universally acceptable styles or procedures for dealing with or reporting conflict situations by the media. According to Bukoye (2011), the strategy and style of reporting conflict are strategic in the study and promotion of peace in every system because they influence and shape the attitude, perceptions, actions, and reactions of actors in conflict situations. The majority of conflicts arise from the behaviors of most of the youths. By its very nature, conflict is counterproductive. Indeed, the bases of conflicts in different parts of Nigeria are closely related to their economic, cultural, and political history. Therefore, conflict is an inherent part of power politics involving the use of violence or coercion to achieve a particular interest (Bukoye, 2011). Conflicts are caused by differences in opinion and perspectives, major or minor positions, injustices, greed, misinformation, revenge, cultural differences, and superiority complexes.

The case of the North-Eastern part of Nigeria illustrates central aspects of this global problem. Four years of domestic conflict have caused the displacement of over a million persons, and more than 48 local government areas are now affected by forced displacement (Refugees Studies Solidarity, ND). As an after-effect of conflicts, presently over 500,000 people are seeking support under the government-assisted programmes. Nigeria was ranked eighth among countries with the highest numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) due to conflicts. The ongoing crisis of Boko Haram in Nigeria has generated an estimated 1 to 2 million deaths (Human Rights Watch, ND). Clashes between the Fulani herders and farmers, conflicts between government security agents and armed militants, Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, banditry, election-related conflicts, and power control violence, which are mostly rooted and escalated by the youths, are major problems having nasty consequences on Nigeria as a country.

When people are asked about their concept of conflict, they often use words such as war, fight, chaos, oppression, inequality, aggravation, aggression, arguments, destruction, crises, stress, cheating, misunderstanding, and suppression, among others.

Perceptions on Security Threats

These are some perceptions of security and its threats. First, anxiety or anything else that has the potential to make people fearful, impaired, or injured could be considered an indicator of insecurity. Politics, economics, religion, and the environment are all aspects that can contribute to this

occurrence. Second, conflicts that are both violent and non-violent may result in insecurity. Third, insecurity may be used as a business tool to prevent the loss of human and material resources.

Fourth, it is possible to be aware of insecurity. Sixth, the issue of insecurity has spread from violent to non-violent disputes, which has major repercussions in emerging nations. And seventh, the scholars' perspective on insecurity described above failed to recognize that the failure of the state to provide the services or facilities needed to ensure public safety.

Under normal circumstances, one of the responsibilities of the state is to assure adequate protection of people and property while simultaneously providing for basic needs. But only competent and efficient leaders can successfully carry out such important duties. As a result, it may be claimed that in a society that lacks security, the institutions that exercise political and social control are failing, which may also lead to unrest in other institutions. The above highlights the necessity for a social discourse on insecurity, taking into account its effects on national development and Nigerians' quality of life.

Types of Conflicts

There are several types of conflicts, namely, intrapersonal and interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup, and international as in between nations. The above-mentioned types of conflicts occur frequently, mostly due to escalating arousal by youths. This leads us to the following questions.

Violent Conflicts

According to Ikeke (2014), violent conflicts are performances of thoughtful violence leading to unswerving attack on people's physical or psychological truthfulness or psychological integrity. The author continues by saying that it includes all forms of murder, extermination, conflict, breaching the law, massacre, assassinations, and terrorism.

When one or two people, organizations, parties, or communities are involved in a discrepancy that causes dispute and fight over resources, violent conflicts can result from any sort of coercive or brutal action, including physical or emotional suffering. These include incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, theft, torture, political riots and assassinations, rape, and religious and ethnic violence (Edigin, 2010; Esiri, 2016; Ubhenin, 2013), among others. People use hazardous materials and immaterial weapons to arm their adversaries in these circumstances in an effort to win. While non-material weapons use words of mouth or other fetish methods, material weapons use firearms and ammo.

Non-Violent Conflict

Non-violent conflicts are based on Haq's seven categories of threats to humanity, as cited in the Human Development Report (1994) and the United Nations Development Programme (xxxx). These categories include food insecurity, economic insecurity, health insecurity, personal insecurity, community insecurity, political insecurity, and environmental insecurity (Otaha, 2013). Non-violent conflicts are mainly observed in developing nations, where the government fails to provide citizens with basic needs such as efficient transportation systems, access to healthcare, clean drinking water, wholesome food, suitable housing, decent jobs, electricity, and high-quality education (Ogbeidi, 2012;

Ojo, 2016; Okafor, 2012; Tambuwal, 2013). These needs are essential for a successful existence, yet the least developed nations lack many of them. Scholars such as Lawal and Abe (2011) and Mohammed (2013) have linked these needs to non-violent confrontations. Non-violent conflicts are more common and have adverse effects on Nigerians' wellbeing, life expectancy, and the human development index. Additionally, they can have a negative impact on Nigerians' productivity, effectiveness, and most ofutions that contribute to the overall well-being of the nation.

According to Bukoye (2011), conflict is inevitable and occurs daily. Individuals encounter at least two to three conflicts every day, whether at home, work, social outings, or even while sleeping (intra-personal conflict). The causes of conflicts can be classified as follows: conflicts over resources, conflicts over psychological needs, and conflicts involving values.

Effects of Conflicts

Conflict is inevitable; we live with it, and it is part of the system (Bukoye, 2011). Since Nigeria's amalgamation, many ethnic, religious, and political conflicts of various dimensions have been amalgamated with it, hence the difficulty in peaceful co-existence. Nigeria has witnessed many ethnic conflicts of various dimensions, like ethnic conflicts masterminded by youths such as Ife-modakeke in 1997, Ijaw-Itsekiri 1993, Zango-kattaf 1992, and others, including Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani, Jukum and Kutab, between 2000 to 2001, Igbo and Hausa in Kano between 1999 and 2001. From the Archive Report of (1996 to 2002), boundary conflicts between Ife and Modakeke in Osun State, Offa and Erin-Ile Kwara State, Isaragi and Share in Kwara State, Ilofa and Odo-Owa also in Kwara State, among others, which history cannot erase till date. Religious conflicts in many states between the Christians and Muslims leading to the burning of churches, mosques, loss of property, and lives are still ongoing till date. The worst part of it all is the issue of Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani herdsmen vs farmers, banditry, and kidnapping in many states of the federation, which have led to the displacement of people far from their homes and resources. There are also political conflicts between party members leading to millions of people losing their lives and belongings, all because of power, greed, poverty, self-centeredness, resources, and revenue sharing, among others. As a result of conflicts, many people have lost their jobs, many have been rendered homeless, many children have become orphans, many homes have been disorganized, and many young ones have become thugs. The effects have pricked the conscience of well-meaning Nigerians.

One could also see that conflicts are an inherent part of power in politics involving the use of violence or coercion to achieve a particular interest (Bukoye, 2011). This has created psychological wars, fears, anxieties, frustrations, and hatred that have increased the intensity of aggressive behaviours and attitudes, which prolong the lifespan of conflicts. It is therefore necessary, as emphasized by Bukoye (2011), that professional counsellors should carry out need assessment surveys and find out the causes and sources of conflicts that lead to crisps, crimes, unrest, demonstrations, and riots that deter development (Bukoye, 2011). For dialogue to be effective in resolving conflicts, there is a need for effective communication. That is, communication should be free and open between conflicting members and the government.

Theoretical Overview

Theories can be seen as systems of ideas or concepts deliberately developed, tested, and used to explain and forecast specific phenomena, usually based on widespread ideologies and independent of the phenomenon being explained. Theories are developed to evaluate or clarify human social situations.

The following scientific procedures must be followed properly while formulating a theory: an unbiased basis for conclusion, respect for accuracy and experimentation, respect for the principle of cause-and-effect relationships, and willingness to recognize the importance of made observations (Aluko, 2016).

Therefore, the term "social theory" refers to a disciplined body of knowledge that aims to explain, characterize, and either confirm or refute social phenomena. Sociological theories function as tools for social change by having the ability to accurately predict the future, which influences both the social structures and the way of life of individuals.

Social Structure & Anomie

As earlier stated, social theory is adopted in this paper. The social theory posits that the environment has a greater influence on shaping the character and behavior of every individual. By implication, those who reside in a decent environment are decent in nature, and those who live in an environment characterized by social vices cannot be exempted from such vices. The theory was propounded by Merton (1957).

Social structure and anomie is a recent theory in the social sciences by Halliru (2012:132) that highlights the active roles of abnormal behavior in criminality. Merton focuses mainly on the "broad patterns of norm-violating behavior rather than in the behavior of individual deviants", using cultural goals, institutional norms, and social structures of society.

Merton examines how people who belong to particular social groups are more likely to be influenced by their surroundings and how this could lead to abnormal behavior. All social strata are supposed to fight for the cultural ideal of material success, which includes wealth and the magnificent possessions a society can afford within its institutions or structure. However, a society that sets a high value on the cultural environment for its citizens' social advancement should provide suitable facilities for their achievements. Unfortunately, society places less emphasis on the ways in which its members might achieve this aim, making them more likely to engage in criminal activity.

Thus, the substantial discrepancy between cultural objectives and structural certainties undermines not only societal support for the existing norms but also serves to encourage the desecration of those norms (Merton, 1957). People who struggle in society's pursuit of economic success are compelled to adapt in bizarre ways to this aggravating environmental circumstance.

Over the years, Nigeria has been the bedrock of great chaos, insurgency, terrorism, and also banditry. Notable security challenges are vivid and have been unable to be curtailed by the government. The most notable insecurity challenges include Boko Haram and banditry in the country. These groups have made life unbearable for those who settle mainly in the Northern region of Nigeria.

The organized group called armed bandits has made livelihood difficult in Niger state. (Chidi Anselm Odinkalu. 2018). Niger state remains the largest city with massive landscape, and Minna being the capital with some major cities like Bida, Kontogora, and Suleja with natural resources and five hydroelectric power dams (Terhemba Wuam, 2014). The bandits, for the past seven years out of the 25 local government areas in the state, have immensely been under siege. (Wole Mosadomi 2021), eighteen have been attacked and continuously invaded and almost completely overrun, and these local government areas include Shiroro, Munyan, Rafi, Mashegu, Zungeru, and recently Paiko and Gulu.

The activities of cattle rustling in 2015 have blown into a Cold War against defenseless people living in the communities. The bandits attacked 40 communities between March to December in 2015, and the government couldn't attribute the gruesome killing to the herdsmen, as proven. The government only identified the herdsmen as those whose source of business and livelihood is grazing of herds. In 2016, about 36 bloody attacks were carried out in 70 communities across Kaure, Kukoki, Ajata, Kwaki in Shiroro local government while in Rafi local government area, Pandogari, Allawa, and Madaka communities were not spared from this menace. The unlawful acts continuously make living a hell, and life is no longer sacred in those parts of Niger state, even to posterity if proper measures aren't taken.

This act of criminality is not just a presence but is fueled by some factors. According to Merton (1957), when persons are choked in their pursuit of economic success in society, they are forced to acclimatize in deviant ways to this exasperating environmental condition. Due to this pursuit, young men sort out illegal ways of securing economic success. Merton states that there are three topologies that contribute to insecurity, basically in Nigeria. These include innovation, retreatism, and rebellion. Merton's explanation of innovation supports the high rates of criminal activities in economic recession of contemporary Nigeria among unemployed and underemployed graduates who engage in violent conflicts for survival (Haruna and Jumba, 2011; Ibekwe and Ewoh, 2012; Igbafe and Offiong, 2007; Smith, 2001). This could lead to what he states as retreatism, which could be applied to the deviant role of smugglers, area boys, touts in motor parks, etc. (Shu-Acquaye, 2013), alamajiris, drug peddlers, omoonile, alcoholics, etc. across Nigeria. They tend to remove themselves from society because they have no means and goals and have no ambition to change their status (Ayodele et al., 2012). He states that rebellion signifies an attempt to greatly amend the existing structure of society, which could be dangerous to national development and the well-being of other persons, as reflected in youth militancy in the south-south, Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, and kidnapping in the southeast. The gang members seem to have made a new goal of gaining power in their gang and using violence and other illegal activities to achieve this (Ayodele et al., 2012).

From the aforementioned, it is crystal clear that banditry in Niger is sponsored by the following factors, which are socioeconomic realities that exist, including multidimensional poverty, widespread unemployment, deprivation, inequality, marginalization, exclusion, and lack of access to basic amenities. Even though this is a national challenge, the North is particularly affected. Secondly, the complex relationship between pastoralists and farmers: desertification, drought, climate change, cattle rustling, insurgency, and population growth have led to the ongoing migration of pastoralists or

herdsmen. Lastly, illegal mining activities in the North West region of the country. Illegal mining is prominent in Niger, Kebbi, Katsina, and Zamfara states, has triggered violent conflict over the control of minefields, and has led to the deaths of thousands of people (Uche and Iwuamadi, 2018). Due to the displacement caused by the conflict, the people of the region engage in banditry as an alternate means of survival (International Crisi Group, 2020).

However, it is necessary to examine the effects and possible solutions to banditry in Niger state. The immediate appearance of banditry has deprived many of lives and shelter, and at the end, more refugees were/are still created. Others flee to neighboring states. These activities also led to the loss of assets, way of life, well-being, and distortion of the education system in rural areas due to the fear of being kidnapped or killed (Adedeji, 2021). This has also prevented teachers from carrying out their duties in school, such as in Government Science College, Kagara, Niger state, on 17th February 2021, when a student was killed, 27 and 3 teachers were abducted, creating tension among the inhabitants. This nature has affected infrastructures like schools, homes, hospitals, and bridges.

One of the major reasons why government intervention seems not to yield is the topographic nature of those areas. The terrain is such that it takes time to access or communicate with security personnel. In some cases, there is little or no security for these communities (Akinwotu, 2020). The forestry and off-road conditions in such areas are other factors. Though armed bandits repeatedly use motorbikes to access communities. Therefore, the government should provide adequate securities and good roads for accessibility in case of emergency. Additionally, the security joint task force should have good and secure communication by providing up-to-date gadgets to them with more weapons and a good investigation about the armed bandits' whereabouts and strategies. The government should consider harmonizing small villages so they can offer more security (Alhaji Mohammad Ketso, 2021). There should be provision of local vigilantes and an open dialogue with the bandits. Most importantly, the inhabitants should be assured of rest as the government takes power.

Recommendations

Having examined the phenomenon of banditry and insecurity in Niger State, it is imperative to employ both kinetic and non-kinetic measures to curtail this ugly trend. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations are hereby put forward with a view to eliminating banditry completely, if not drastically reducing it:

- A coordinated and sustained joint security operation with strict surveillance on the proliferation of weapons is required.
- Fully-scaled ICT drones should be deployed to banditry zones where trackers and communication gadgets can be effectively and efficiently used.
- Community policing to stem the tide of banditry is necessary, as banditry cannot only be tackled by security agencies.
- Strong legislation and formidable punishment for informants requires urgent and prompt attention.

- The activities of informants who share intelligence reports with bandits on the movement of their targets should be checked, and anyone found guilty should be made to carry the weight of the law on their head without any form of prejudice or sentiment.
- The activities of bandits should be condemned in strong terms, and the idea of negotiating with bandits should be outrightly rejected, as bandits are criminal elements in society.
- The government should promulgate a "Village Harmonization Policy" (VHP). The present village setting of distant isolation should be discouraged. With high concentration of large population in one area, it will be difficult for the bandits to overcome any village with ease.

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