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Article

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ASSESSING THE DYNAMICS OF ARMED BANDITRY IN BORDER COMMUNITIES IN KATSINA STATE BETWEEN NIGERIA-NIGER REPUBLIC CORRIDORS

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Abstract

This study assessed the dynamics of armed banditry in border communities in Katsina State between Nigeria-Niger Republic corridors, using a mixed-method approach. The population of the study was 930,900 drawn from the three LGAs: Jabia, Batsari and Safana. A sample of 384 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method and purposive sampling technique was used to select farmers who were affected by the armed banditry and internally displaced. The data were collected using structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) guide. The quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Statistical tools such as percentages, frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation were employed. A hybrid approach involving both thematic and content analyses were adopted for the qualitative data gathered from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Findings revealed that armed banditry in the study area is systematic, highly organized and economically driven in nature. Bandit groups operate as organized coercive actors, imposing informal taxation, regulating access to land and trade routes, and institutionalizing kidnapping for ransom. Finally, the study recommended a hybrid response framework that integrates credible state security presence, community participation, cross-border cooperation, livelihood restoration, and psychosocial interventions to achieve sustainable peace and resilience in communities affected by banditry.

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Keywords: Armed Banditry, Border Communities; Katsina State, Nigeria–Niger Republic Corridor, Agricultural Livelihood.

Introduction

Africa's contemporary security situation has been rightly described as one of complex threats. Among these threats are organized militia, criminal and insurgent groups that engage in subversive acts that negate the stability of the affected states. Often times, these anti-state elements have operated in a tacit synergy to bring about systematic destabilization within a state or a region. Such a pragmatic synergy has been espoused in the conflict-crime-terror nexus narrative. Mojishola (2024) observed that in countries where the government is weak, ineffective, or seen as illegitimate, different types of violence become linked. These include organized crime, armed conflict, and violent extremism. Organized crime, conflict, and violent extremism all thrive when any state is weak or its structure is absent. Where there is a lack of security, a want of access to justice, and poor service provision, then organized crime often fills the void by taking over certain functions of the state (Bature 2023).

In addition to weak and ineffective governments in Africa, arms proliferation puts small arms and light weapons in the hands of subversive non-state actors, some of whom must have gained some combat expertise in the context of existing conflicts. Osasona (2022) stated that the involvement of bandits in arms trafficking has been reported in Kenya's North Rift area, Nigeria's northwestern borderlines with Niger Republic, as well as Mali-Burkina Faso frontier. In terms of its disruptive impact and intensity of violence, Osasona (2022) argued that banditry is the gravest security threat that Africa currently faces, and it is driving her worst national humanitarian crisis in decades. Rufa'i (2018) noted that banditry is a loose collection of various criminal groups involved in kidnap-for-ransom, armed robbery, cattle rustling, rape and other sexual violence, pillage and attacks on traders, farmers and travellers. Mojishola (2024) posited that bandits have been hired by local nomads to fight for them in the various episodes of farmer-herder conflicts in the region. The bandits have also been involved as mercenary fighters in other instances of communal conflicts in Central Nigeria and beyond. The most troubling trajectory of the banditry crisis, however, is its nebulous intersection with jihadism, which has been observed in Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger. This convolution is at the core of the prevailing complex security scenario in the Wider Sahel

In West Africa, armed banditry has become a formidable threat across various regions of Africa. Akinyetun (2022) stressed that the surge in armed banditry in the region is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including governance deficits, socio-economic grievances, environmental degradation such as desertification and resource scarcity, and the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons. Barnett and Rufai (2021) attributed this to collapse of states and conflicts in neighboring countries have contributed significantly to the proliferation of arms across West Africa, empowering criminal elements. Border communities, due to their proximity to these unstable areas and often limited governmental control, become primary targets and transit points for these illicit activities.

In Nigeria for example, the security situation in the country has become increasingly complex and uncertain. In recent years, various non-state armed groups have emerged and consolidated coercive power to terrorize the population in Nigeria, as evident with the activities of the armed bandits, criminal gangs, separatist groups, Islamic fundamentalists, amorphous kidnappers, etc (Ojo, *et al.*, 2023). Global Center for Responsibility to protect (2022) reported that non-state actors differ in their objectives, tactics, and operational

simulations. As a result of the activities of non-state armed groups targeting the civilian population and its attendant security consequences, there are more than 8.7 million people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance in the country. Ojo, *et al.*, (2023) argued that these armed groups engage in organized attacks that feature cattle-rustling, rape, looting, plundering, kidnapping and murder. Between 2018 and 2020, at least 4,900 deaths were caused by armed banditry, which also generated hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north-west. For instance, between January 6 and 8, 2022, armed bandits attacked several villages in Zamfara State, killing more than 200 people and leaving 10,000 displaced. These, among other events have claimed several lives and caused significant economic destruction.

In Katsina State, however, the recent escalation of armed banditry in the state and its environs presents a distinct and alarming evolution of this challenge. These criminal groups, often operating from ungoverned spaces and forests, exploit the porous borders to perpetrate their acts and evade capture, making communities along these frontiers particularly susceptible (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2023). The modus operandi of these bandits has evolved from opportunistic crimes to more organized and sustained assaults, resulting in massive displacement, disruption of livelihoods, and a pervasive climate of fear.

Statement of the Problem

Katsina State, located in Nigeria's Northwest geopolitical zone, shares a significant international border with Niger Republic, making its border communities uniquely vulnerable to transnational criminal activities. In recent years, these communities have been subjected to an escalating wave of armed banditry, characterized by a range of violent acts including kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, village raids, extortion, and the imposition of illegal levies (Amnesty International Nigeria, 2025). Armed banditry has remained a pervasive and escalating challenge in the border communities of study areas. It is characterized by frequent violent attacks, abductions, cattle rustling, and the destruction of property. Bandit groups operate with relative impunity due to the porous borders. The prevalence of banditry has created a climate of fear and displacement, with dire implications for the agricultural activities in the state. Despite the critical role these border communities play in cross-border trade, agricultural production, and regional stability, they are increasingly facing severe insecurity that fundamentally threatens their existence and well-being (HumAngle Media, 2024). Armed banditry has led to the destruction of farms, theft of livestock, and forced migration of farmers, significantly reducing food production and pushing many communities toward chronic hunger and malnutrition (HumAngle Media, 2024). Understanding the extent and dynamics of these effects is critical for informing effective policy interventions and reinforcing the resilience of border populations. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the effects of armed banditry on livelihoods of border communities between Nigeria-Niger Republic corridors in Katsina State.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the dynamics of armed banditry in border communities in Katsina State between Nigeria-Niger republic corridors. Other objective is to examine the nature of armed banditry attacks on border communities between Nigeria-Niger Republic corridors in Katsina State.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

- i. What is the nature of armed banditry attacks on border communities between Nigeria-Niger Republic corridors in Katsina State?

Literature Review

Armed banditry: Banditry is an organized crime involving kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources. The concept of banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. Scholars have consistently debated the term banditry, what it is, and how it impacts humanity. However, the first generation of debates primarily focused on Eric Hobsbawm's social banditry. They focused more on defining bandits' character and capability to challenge the state and its institutions (Okoli and Ogayi, 2018). Despite that, there seemed to be varying degrees of conceptualizations that have constituted even more challenges than solving the previous ones. To this end, conceptualizing banditry within the context of this paper would no doubt create a better framework for understanding its consequences for effective analysis. Thus, this section explores the concept of banditry and focuses specifically on the experience of northwestern Nigeria. Bandits have been identified with several names depending on the context within which they were placed. For instance, initially, bandits were considered primitive rebels and were also identified as bandits due to operational changes within social class relationships (Osasona, 2021).

Nature of Armed Banditry in Border Communities Between Nigeria-Niger Republic Corridors in Kasina State

Bandits in local communities in between Nigeria-Niger republic corridors in Kasina State often terrorize rural farmers. Their activities include kidnapping, arson, rape, cattle rustling, killing, and looting. Some people believe that the frequency of under-governed spaces where the government's control is futile is a significant cause of banditry. Such areas are breed by bad governance, weak legality, prolonged conflict and poor governance which expose citizens to exploitation by bandits, traffickers and other criminal elements. Mojishola (2024), observed that these poorly governed territories are overwhelmed by bandits due to their remoteness with hills and thick forests, allowing illegal activities to continue. It is not exceptional to find human trafficking, cattle rustling and illegal mining in areas like Kaduna, Katsina, Niger and Zamfara States. Such areas stimulate illegal, informal economic activity. Meanwhile, the Nigerian security forces are generally understaffed and poorly equipped, making them vulnerable to promoting security in such areas.

There are various types of armed banditry. These include social, rural-urban frontier, countryside, mercenary, organized, maritime, and petty banditry. Relative deprivation, social inequalities, and grievances often trigger armed banditry. Locational operation defines the rural and urban banditry and the frontier and countryside banditry. Mercenary banditry can be characterized as either an agency or a master servant relationship, as a case of a group operating under a master who provides necessary logistics. Organized banditry operates across borders through an efficient network and command structure (International Crisis Group, 2020). Banditry is the taking of property using force or the threat of force, often by a group, usually made up of men. Banditry usually operates in the shadows, often on the outskirts of civilization, in remote locations, and it is done out of necessity (Anka, 2017).

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design with a mixed-method of data collection which combined both quantitative and qualitative data. The study focused on

three (3) local governments areas in Katsina State, Nigeria. These include Jibia, Batsari, and Safana Local Government Areas. These three local government Areas are the major hotspots where banditry activities are very high in the boarder communities between Nigeria and Niger Republic in Katsina State, Nigeria. the population of the study was 930,900 drawn from the three LGAs as follows: Jabia 299200, Batsari 326000 and Safana 305700. A sample of 384 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling method and purposive sampling technique was used to select farmers who were affected by the armed banditry and those that were internally displaced. The data was systematically gathered through the administration of structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) guide. It was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Statistical tools such as percentages, frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation were employed on a 5 Point Likert Scale. Decision rule applied was that any mean response greater than or equal to 2.5 was considered accepted or adjudged as 'agree,' while any mean response lower than 2.5 was rejected or adjudged as 'disagree.' On the other hand, a hybrid approach involving both thematic analysis and content analysis was adopted for the qualitative data gathered from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

Results

Research Question One: *What is the nature of armed banditry attacks on border communities in Katsina State, between Nigeria-Niger Republic corridors?*

	Jibia								Safana								Batsari							
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	S.E Mean	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	S.E Mean	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	S.E Mean			
Killing of community members	0	0	0	10	90	4.9	0.03	1	1	10	16	72	4.57	0.08	2	0	5	13	80	4.69	0.07			
Burning of houses	0	0	0	20	80	4.8	0.04	5	4	8	48	34	4.03	0.10	1	1	6	29	63	4.52	0.07			
Attack/looting of traders	0	0	2	32	64	4.63	0.05	5	6	19	37	32	3.92	0.14	6	1	11	31	51	4.27	0.13			
Burning farm produce	0	0	0	34	63	4.65	0.05	3	12	36	17	30	3.60	0.11	1	2	15	23	59	4.37	0.09			
Looting of farm produce	0	1	1	46	51	4.48	0.05	12	12	22	23	28	3.44	0.14	3	5	7	37	48	4.22	0.10			
Destruction of schools	0	0	1	36	60	4.60	0.05	11	16	7	32	30	3.56	0.14	12	8	2	30	46	3.9184	0.14			
Forceful collection of rent from farmers	0	0	1	31	68	4.67	0.05	2	21	22	20	32	3.60	0.12	1	1 5	8	26	49	4.0808	0.11			
Kidnapping for ransom	0	0	3	30	66	4.63	0.05	18	6	14	28	32	3.51	0.15	16	3	3	27	51	3.94	0.15			
Cattle rustling	0	0	3	36	60	4.58	0.06	5	14	27	26	25	3.54	0.12	3	4	17	27	49	4.15	0.10			
Rape	1	0	4	27	67	4.61	0.07	4	8	8	36	44	4.08	0.11	0	5	3	35	57	4.44	0.08			
Attacks on trade routes	1	0	2	43	52	4.50	0.07	6	3	15	23	53	4.14	0.16	2	2	4	32	60	4.46	0.08			

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2025.

Key: All mean values are above 2.5 threshold

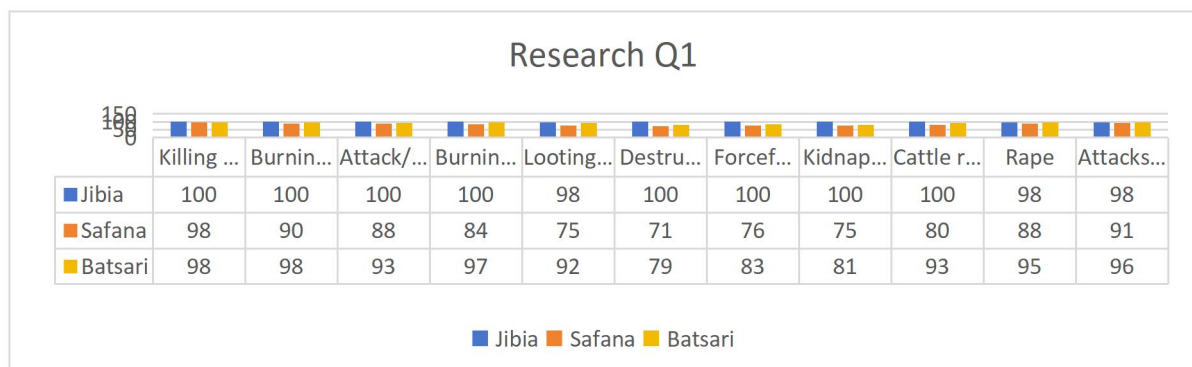


Fig.1: Bar chart illustration of the nature of armed banditry attacks on border communities of Katsina state: Jibia, Batsari, and Safana LGAs.

From the data analysis results on Table 1, there is evidence to support the occurrence of severe and systematic violence across all three border communities. The consistently high mean scores (most of which are above 4.0 on a 5-point scale) are indicative of strong agreement on the prevalence of various types or nature of armed banditry attacks on the border communities between Nigeria and Niger Republic in Katsina state.

Jibia experienced the most severe attacks, with *"killing of community members"* recording the highest mean value, followed by *"burning of houses"* and *"kidnapping for ransom"*. These uniformly high average scores suggest that Jibia faces multi-faceted attacks affecting all aspects of community life.

Data on Safana shows a relatively moderate rating concerning pattern of attacks. The means ranging from the rating ranges from 98 to 71 with nature of attacks revealing killings and rape, while economic-focused nature of attacks like *"looting of farm produce"* were lower. The higher standard errors in Safana suggest that the experiences among respondents are more varied, possibly indicating spatially uneven attack patterns within the community. Batsari demonstrates high vulnerability on matters like *"Killing of community members"* and *"burning of houses"* as major issues, similar to Jibia. Notably, *"rape"* scores suggest of an underlying serious gender-based violence concerns. Across all locations, the data reveals that bandits employ multifaceted strategies: direct violence (killing, rape), economic exploitation (cattle rustling, looting, forced rent collection), infrastructure destruction (burning houses/schools), and trade disruption (attacks on trade routes). The consistency of high scores across communities suggests organized, systematic criminal enterprises rather than random violence.

Response from the KII: A 52-year-old male farmer from Jibia stated that; they killed our young men who dare to resist, burn everything. They burned houses, the farms so we ended up with no shelter and food. It is to make sure we cannot return. They want the land for themselves" (Interview, 2025). Some interviewees described kidnapping as a highly organized criminal business. They explained that bandits operate with a structure of leadership. A community leader in Jibia explained that "bandits have a price list. Prices largely depends on the person in their custody. They negotiate with people on the phone. They tell us, 'If you do not pay in specified days, we will kill the captive'. While killings and burnings were openly discussed, the issue of rape was often shrouded in silence, only emerging through trusted female interviewers and in women-only situations. Some interviewees described attacks as a periodic economic extraction. A 25-year-old male herder from Runka in Safana Local Government Area revealed that, they come on motorcycles during the harvest season. They do not always burn; sometimes they just take everything. If you have cows, that is their first target." A trader from Jibia explained that, "before you can farm on your own land, at times, you have to pay 'tax' to the bandits. They extort travelers and drivers on the roads. Bandits have informants in almost every village and community. If you refuse to obey their orders, you become a target. They are not just criminals, they are a shadow government." (interview, 2025).

Discussion of Findings

Nature of Armed Banditry Attacks in Border Communities of Katsina State: The findings revealed that armed banditry on the Nigeria and Niger Republic border corridors in Katsina State is systematic, violent, and economically predatory, with high levels of convergence across Jibia, Safana, and Batsari. The consistently high mean scores, particularly above the 4.0 threshold in most indicators, suggested that banditry is perceived as an organized and routine form of insecurity rather than isolated criminal incidents. Across the study areas, killing of community members emerged as one of the most dominant features of banditry. This finding aligns with existing literature that identifies lethal violence as a central tactic of armed bandits in Northwest Nigeria, used to intimidate populations, eliminate resistance, and weaken traditional authority structures (International Crisis Group, 2020; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). The burning of houses and farm produce, which recorded very high mean values indicated that the use of scorched-earth strategies. Scholars argued that such destruction is intended to force displacement, disrupt food systems, and undermine the long-term survival capacity of rural communities (Akinwale, 2021; ACLED, 2022). The destruction of schools further underscores how banditry contributes to the erosion of social infrastructure, reinforcing findings that insecurity in Northwest Nigeria has severely disrupted access to education and social services (UNICEF, 2021).

Economic predation is another defining dimension of banditry as evident in the findings. High mean scores for attack and looting of traders, looting of farm produce, cattle rustling, and attacks on trade routes confirmed that banditry operates as a form of criminal political economy. This corroborates studies that describe armed banditry as an adaptive survival economy sustained through livestock theft, market extortion, and highway ambushes (Mustapha, 2021; Rufa'i, 2020). The forceful collection of rent from farmers and kidnapping for ransom further demonstrate the transformation of bandit groups into organized coercive authorities. This finding supports the arguments that bandits increasingly impose informal taxation systems and ransom regimes, effectively replacing the state in regulating access to land, mobility, and livelihoods (Abdullahi, 2019; Okoli & Lenshie, 2022). This phenomenon aligns with broader literature on non-state armed groups assuming quasi-governance roles in weakly governed borderlands. Notably, the high mean scores recorded for rape, highlighted the gendered dimension of armed banditry. Existing research shows that sexual violence in banditry contexts is often underreported but used strategically to terrorize communities, humiliate male relatives, and enforce compliance (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Similarly, the qualitative findings revealed the use of targeted killings and scorched-earth tactics as instruments of territorial conquest and forced displacement. The killing of vocals and resistant youth, followed by the destruction of houses, farms, and grain silos indicate a calculated effort to eliminate resistance. This pattern aligns with studies that describe bandit violence as a strategy for land seizure and long-term control of agrarian spaces, particularly in poorly governed borderlands (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2020). The organization of kidnapping for ransom as described by respondents revealed banditry as a structured criminal economy. The existence of leadership hierarchies, ransom price lists, and deadline-driven negotiations agree to existing literature that armed bandit groups in Northwest Nigeria operate as rational economic actors embedded in translocal criminal networks (Mustapha, 2021; Rufa'i, 2020). This institutionalization of kidnapping has transformed abduction into a predictable revenue stream, reinforcing insecurity while normalizing extortion as part of everyday life. The patterns observed on the

boarder communities confirmed that armed banditry in Katsina State's border communities constitutes a complex security crisis combining extreme violence, organized crime, economic exploitation, and social destruction. These findings strongly corroborate existing literature that situates armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria within broader dynamics of weak state presence, porous borders, rural marginalization, and the proliferation of armed non-state actors (International Crisis Group, 2020; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

Conclusion

Armed banditry on boarder communities between Nige and Niger Republic corridors in Katsina State, Nigeria has evolved from a security problem into a comprehensive humanitarian and development crisis. The systematic nature of attacks, combined with weak state response, has created conditions approaching state failure in some localities. The findings established that the nature of armed banditry on the boarder communities is characterized by extreme violence, organized criminality, and economic predation. Killings, kidnappings, sexual violence, and the destruction of homes, farms, schools, and food systems reveal a deliberate strategy aimed at terrorizing populations, dismantling traditional authority, forcing displacement, and asserting territorial and economic control. Bandit groups operate as organized coercive actors, imposing informal taxation, regulating access to land and trade routes, and institutionalizing kidnapping for ransom. In this sense, banditry in the study area increasingly resembles a form of violent non-state governance rather than mere opportunistic crime.

On the disruption of agricultural livelihoods, which remain the backbone of economic survival in the study communities, the findings show widespread farm abandonment, reduced food production, displacement of farming households, rising input and labor costs, and persistent food insecurity. Armed banditry has transformed agriculture into a high-risk activity, undermining both subsistence and commercial farming. The resulting decline in food availability and quality has not only weakened household resilience but also contributed to rising food prices and broader instability in the border communities and beyond.

Recommendations

- i. To achieve greater impact on curtailing the systemic nature of the bandit attacks, Nigeria Government should create an intelligence framework that integrates the efforts of the Department of State Services, the Armed Forces, the Nigeria Police, and structured local vigilante groups in the boarder communities and beyond in order to enhance coordination and information sharing. Through this framework, the agencies should function within a synchronized system in which intelligence is collected, analyzed, and disseminated.
- ii. In line with the demand of the 21st century, modern surveillance technology should be employed into security operations such as drones and the use of satellite mapping to monitor forests areas especially the Rugu Forest that link Nigeria, through Katsina, and Niger - Republic.

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